

Book 5 in the *Little Books on Buddhism Series*

Second Edition

The Little Book of Buddhist Mindfulness & Concentration



by Eric K. Van Horn

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*Dedicated to Venerable Anuruddha,
who lived with his companions in the holy life
“in concord, with mutual appreciation,
without disputing,
blending like milk and water,
viewing each other with kindly eyes.” - [MN 4.6]*

“The safe and good path to be traveled joyfully’ is a term for the Noble Eight Book Path.”

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Table of Contents

[Preface](#)

[Terminology and Conventions](#)

[Internet Conventions](#)

[Abbreviations Used for Pāli Text References](#)

[1. Introduction](#)

[2. Right Mindfulness](#)

[The Four Foundations of Mindfulness](#)

[Mindfulness of Breathing](#)

[3. Right Concentration](#)

[The Material Attainments](#)

[The Immaterial Attainments](#)

[4. Mindfulness & Concentration](#)

[5. Postscript](#)

[Appendices](#)

[Appendix A - Glossary of Terms](#)

[Appendix B - Bibliography](#)

[Appendix C - Jhāna in the Majjhima Nikāya](#)

Preface

*Know from the rivers
in clefts and in crevices:
those in small channels flow
noisily,
the great
flow silent.*

*Whatever's not full
makes noise.*

*Whatever is full
is quiet.*

- [SN 3.11]

This book describes the Buddha's teachings on mindfulness and concentration. It might also be called "Advanced Buddhist Meditation." This title correctly implies that there is a "Basic Buddhist Meditation." More properly there is "Basic Buddhist Practice." This is what the previous Little Books describe. And as many of you know, Buddhist practice is not just meditation. The foundation for the path is the practice of virtue, what the Buddha called "the discipline."

I hope that you will not just jump to the practices of mindfulness and concentration thinking that you can skip the other steps. Even if you are an experienced meditator, this method of practice may be quite different from what you are used to. You should at least skim the other volumes.

This approach to practice is rooted in early Buddhism, in the Buddha's original teachings. One person described it as non-sectarian. I arrived at this style of practice by going from one school to another, digging deeper and deeper into the tradition until I arrived at the original discourses. What I found there was what scholars call the "coherent and cogent" teachings of the Buddha and a style of practice that hardly anyone teaches. But some people do teach in a way that is consistent with what

the Buddha taught and that the canonical literature describes. They can just be hard to find.

Buddhism is unique in that when it reforms, it reforms back in the direction of orthodoxy. Usually we think of reform as moving in the direction of something that is new or better, something that is more modern. But in Buddhism it is the opposite. Over time we stray from the Buddha's original teachings, and that gets us into trouble. Then the solution is to go back to what he taught.

There is a lot of hubris in modern life. You read about how Buddhism needs to modernize and westernize. We think that science and technology make us superior to our ancestors. But if anything, technology puts us at a disadvantage. We have mastered the art of distraction and overly developed intellects. Our lives are full of noise, and we have automated the feeding of our wild minds. The antidote is to do what Buddhism has been doing for 2500 years, and that is to go back and rediscover what the Buddha taught. What we find is that the human mind has not changed, and that the solution to our problems of living has not changed either.

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Terminology and Conventions

Because the Buddhist Canon that I use is in the Pāli language, I usually use Pāli terms. However, some Sanskrit Buddhist terms have become common in the English language and it seems rather affected not to use them. The two most obvious examples are the words “nirvāṇa,” which is “nibbāna” in Pāli, and “Dharma,” which is “Dhamma” in Pāli. For the most part, I use the commonly known terms. But if it seems awkward to have the Pāli terms in quotes or in certain words (like *Dhammacakkappavattana*) and use the Sanskrit terms in the main text, I use the Pāli words.

I try to avoid technical terms in the beginning of the guide until you can get used to them. However, if there are terms with which you are unfamiliar, they should be in the glossary in Appendix A.

As per APA style guidelines, book names are italicized (i.e., *Foundations of Buddhism*) and magazine articles and Internet resources are capitalized and quoted (i.e., “The Benefits of Walking Meditation”).

Internet Conventions

There are many references to resources that are on the Internet. This is always a problem because hyperlinks are notoriously unreliable. Thus, I have adopted a convention of putting Internet search keywords in the text as well as a hyperlink to the resource. For example, a reference to Thich Nhat Hahn’s gāthās (“poems”) is “[thich nhat hanh gathas here and now](#).” If links are supported and the link is not broken, clicking on the search keywords will open that resource. If you are reading this in a context where Internet links are not supported or the link is broken, you can still find the resource by doing a search using the keywords. If you use the search keywords, the resource should be the first one in the search result list.

The other case is when an article is cited. It will look like this:

- [Sayadaw U Silananda, "[The Benefits of Walking Meditation](#)"]

Again, if your reader does not support hyperlinks or the link is broken, searching on the author's name and the article name should get you to the article. Some names and words use diacritical marks and you may have to remove them to find the correct resource. For example, for the name "Thānissaro" use the non-diacritical form "Thanissaro."

Abbreviations Used for Pāli Text References

AN: *Anguttara Nikāya, The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*

Bv: *Buddhavaṃsa, Chronicle of Buddhas*

BvA: *Buddhavaṃsatthakathā, commentary to the Buddhavaṃsa*

Cv: *Cullavagga, the “smaller book,” the second volume in the Khandhaka, which is the second book of the monastic code (the Vinaya)*

Dhp: *Dhammapada, The Path of Dhamma, a collection of 423 verses*

DhpA: *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā, commentary to the Dhammapada*

DN: *Dīgha Nikāya, The Long Discourses of the Buddha*

Iti: *Itivuttaka, This Was Said (by the Buddha), a.k.a., Sayings of the Buddha*

Ja: *Jātaka Tales, previous life stories of the Buddha*

JaA: *Jātaka-aṭṭhakathā, commentary on the Jātaka Tales*

Khḥp: *Khuddakapāṭha, Short Passages*

MA: *Majjhima Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā, commentary on the Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (by Buddhaghosa)*

MN: *Majjhima Nikāya, The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*

Mv: *Mahāvagga, the first volume in the Khandhaka, which is the second book of the monastic code (the Vinaya)*

Pm: *Pātimokkha, The Code of Monastic Discipline*, the first book of the monastic code (the Vinaya)

SN: *Samyutta Nikāya, The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*

S Nip: *Sutta Nipāta, The Sutta Collection*, literally, “suttas falling down,” a sutta collection in the *Khuddaka Nikāya* consisting mostly of verse

Sv: *Sutta-vibhaṅga: Classification of the Suttas*, the “origin stories” for the Pātimokkha rules

Thag: *Theragāthā: Verses of the Elder Monks*

ThagA: *Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā*, Commentary to the *Theragāthā*

Thig: *Therīgāthā: Verses of the Elder Nuns*

ThigA: *Therīgāthā-aṭṭhakathā*, Commentary to the *Therīgāthā*

Ud: *Udana, Exclamations*, the third book of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*

Vin: *Vinaya Pitaka, Basket of Discipline*, the monastic rules for monks and nuns.

1. Introduction

“These two things - serenity and insight - occur in him yoked evenly together.” - [MN 149.10]

The foundation of Buddhist practice is like the three legs of a milking stool. If you remove one leg it isn't going to work very well. As the Buddha taught in the last year of his life, the practice is virtue, concentration, and wisdom.

The previous Little Books describe the first phase of a mature Buddhist practice. The first leg of the stool is a meditation practice that creates a sense of well-being. This is your home base. Whenever you run into trouble, you return to this stable, secure place. This is what the Buddha taught when his monks were revolted by reflecting on the foulness of the body. If the mind is distressed, go back to the breath and the safety and comfort it provides. Mettā meditation is also quite helpful.

The second leg of the stool is virtue and bringing the practice into daily life. If you are just practicing on the cushion, the practice is not very helpful. This is the “discipline” part of the “dhamma and discipline” that the Buddha said he taught.

The third leg of the stool is the wisdom teachings: karma, The Four Noble Truths, causation, and the three characteristics of non-self, impermanence, and dukka. You study these and understand them as best you can in order to plant seeds in your sub-conscious. As your practice deepens, your understanding of them will grow. You will have insights into them. You will see them manifest in your mind.



Figure: The three legs of basic Buddhist practice

This book on Buddhist mindfulness and concentration describes phase two of a Buddhist practice. The practice of mindfulness leads to greater levels of concentration. This ultimately manifests in the practice of *jhāna*, meditative absorption. As your mindfulness grows, your concentration grows, and as your concentration grows your mindfulness grows. As your mindfulness and concentration grow, insights arise. The wisdom teachings go from being an intellectual understanding to direct, personal experience. Concentration and insight can then occur “yoked evenly together.”

There are other benefits to deepening concentration as well. The pleasure of concentration replaces the cruder and more problematic sense pleasures. Sense pleasures get us into all kinds of trouble. The mind is

constantly seeking them out. Our minds jump from one to another, and we become slaves to them. They are addictions. Some of these addictions are reasonably harmless, and some of them are quite dangerous. They cause all kinds of conflict in the world. They create problems for us and the people around us. One of the Buddha's important insights was not to be afraid of the "pleasure born of seclusion" which is the pleasure that comes from concentration. One way to look at phase two of your practice is that you replace sense pleasures with the pleasure born of seclusion.

Another benefit to concentration is that the mind gets quieter. This culminates in states of deep serenity, calm, tranquility, and silence. Getting the mind quiet is a considerable task. The first time that you experience silence it may be frightening. But gently and lovingly return to it. The fear will go away, and you will begin to feel safety and security there. Larry Rosenberg says that there is great healing in silence. And as the mind gets quieter, you will be able to see more and more subtle movements in the mind, and you will start getting them to calm and quiet as well. You are moving toward enlightenment, toward awakening.

All of this takes time, and you will probably find your mind fighting some of these developments. That is fine. Do not worry about any of this. Just keep doing the best that you can. You ease into a lot of these experiences. They often come at the most unexpected times. And they often manifest in the most peculiar ways. Sharon Salzberg says that suddenly something will happen and you find yourself thinking, well, *that* was different.

A very typical course is that you read about something like craving and you think, well, I don't want to give up all my stuff. I like to eat and I like to listen to music and so forth. You *like* sense pleasures. Of course you do. That is how beings are. Just keep at it. Don't make this into a problem. We all have plenty of problems, and our Buddhist practice does not have to be a new one. But over time you may find that maybe you eat a little less, and maybe sometimes you like to drive without the radio on. It is baby steps. Give your mind time and space. It will get there at its own pace and in its own good time. And as you have these experiences,

you will find small moments of deep contentment.

In Buddhist practice you hardly ever make something happen directly. You put the conditions into place for something to manifest and let it happen on its own. It is like gardening. You prepare the soil, plant the seeds, water them, weed them and fertilize them and after a fashion the plants grow and produce fruit. We are not normally wired in that way. We want to “succeed.” We want medals of progress that we can pin on our chest, trophies we can put on our mantels. This is where the practice takes faith. And the more the practice manifests in positive ways, the more your trust and confidence in the practice will grow.

The most important words in Buddhist practice are patience and persistence. Have patience with yourself. Be your own best friend. This path does work. People have been doing it for over 2500 years. You can do it, too.

2. Right Mindfulness

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness

The first discourse we will discuss is the “Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta: The Four Foundations of Mindfulness.” There are two versions of this sutta, one in the *Majjhima Nikāya* (MN 10) and one in the *Dīgha Nikāya* (DN 22). The one that is most commonly referenced is the *Majjhima Nikāya* version, and that is the one that we will discuss here.

There are also two versions of this sutta in the Chinese Canons. (There are two different versions of the Buddhist Canon in Chinese.) These yield some interesting comparisons. It is worth looking at the differences between the three versions.

The four foundations of mindfulness are as follows:

1. The body
2. Feelings
3. The mind, or mental formations
4. Mind objects, or mental qualities

For each foundation, or “frame of reference,” the sutta describes corresponding meditation practices. However, the inventory of practices is different in each version of the sutta. In the following table you see the differences in those inventories. (This table approximates the one in the book *Perspectives on Satipaṭṭhāna* by Ajahn Anālayo.) The *Majjhima Nikāya* column is the Pāli Canon (nikāyas), and the other two are the Chinese Canons (āgamas):

Satipaṭṭhāna	Majjhima Nikāya	Madhyama-āgama	Ekottarika-āgama
body	breathing postures activities body parts 4 elements corpse	postures activities counter unwholesome states forceful mind control breathing 4 jhānas perception of light reviewing sign body parts 6 elements corpse	body parts 4 elements bodily orifices corpse
feelings	3 and 6 types	3 and 18 types	3 and 6 types
mind	8 pairs	10 pairs	12 pairs
mind objects	hindrances aggregates sense-spheres Awakening factors 4 noble truths	sense spheres hindrances Awakening factors	Awakening factors jhānas

I have a theory about the differences. As usual I will caution you that I am not a scholar so treat this as the Buddhist equivalent of pillow talk. The Buddha's teachings have a problem in that he never gave an introductory talk of everything that he taught. There is no basic outline or overview. The monks and nuns memorized the discourses, and eventually they would see how everything fits together. Because they were memorized, the discourses were kept relatively short. Each discourse is a piece of the puzzle, and once they had enough pieces they would be able to see the whole picture.

Now we move forward in time. Different groups of monks concentrated on a subset of discourses. Further, fewer and fewer monks knew the whole Canon. There was a famine in Sri Lanka, and many monks died. There was one section of the Canon that only one monk knew. The landscape of Buddhist practice changed. The tradition was in danger of dying out.

And here we are now, many hundreds of years in the future, and we do not memorize the discourses. In fact, very few people have read even one

volume of them. And this brings me to two points about the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. The first is that I think over time more material was brought into the sutta to give it a broader scope. Its purpose was to contain many meditation practices so it could act as a general guide. Note, by the way, that I am not suggesting - as some have - that any of this material is inauthentic. It is simply material that was brought in from other parts of the Canon. Now, many years later, with three different versions of the sutta it is easier to guess what is original.

When I first read this sutta, the section on the fourth foundation was quite confusing to me. When I later read it with some idea of what was original and what was added, it made more sense.

The second point is that one of the dangers in the Buddha's teachings is that it is easy to take one discourse or a small collection of discourses and over-extrapolate from those. For example, when you read the whole *Majjhima Nikāya*, the importance of jhāna becomes clear. That is not obvious if you just read a few discourses.

Buddhism is like anything else. It has cliques, trends, and fashions, and people and teachings in the Buddhist world come in and out of favor. In recent years the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta has gotten a lot of favorable momentum. I spent two years reading everything that I could about it. I took a course in it, went on a retreat about it, listened to dozens of Dharma talks on it, and so forth. But as a result of this popular momentum it has, I think, taken on an importance that is out of balance. To be sure this is a very important sutta. But it is not the whole of the Buddha's teachings, and its importance can only be understood when you put it into this larger context.

In the next section we will talk about the eighth factor in the Noble Eightfold Path, right concentration. The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta is, as the title states, about the seventh factor in the path, right mindfulness. The cultivation of right mindfulness leads to the mastery of right concentration, which the Buddha defined as jhāna, or meditative absorption. All seven of the previous factors culminate in the eighth

factor. The eighth factor is not possible without the previous seven:

“And what, bhikkhus, is noble right concentration with its supports and its accessories? There are: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness. The one-pointedness of mind equipped with these seven factors is called noble right concentration ‘with its supports,’ and also ‘with its accessories.’” - [SN 45.28]

But there is a particularly close bond between right mindfulness and right concentration. When right mindfulness leads to right concentration, right concentration leads to stronger right mindfulness:

“Again, a bhikkhu develops serenity and insight in conjunction. As he is developing serenity and insight in conjunction, the path is generated. He pursues this path, develops it, and cultivates it. As he is pursuing, developing, and cultivating this path, the fetters are abandoned and the underlying tendencies are uprooted.” - [AN 4.170]

How to Work with These Practices

When you start a regular meditation practice, the first phase is to stay with the breath, to experience the breath in the whole body, to get the breath comfortable, and to do all this with a goal of establishing comfort and well-being. The first book in this series, *The Little Book of Buddhist Meditation*, describes a system of training that has these as its goals. You will see some overlap with how the Buddha taught meditation. They have the same objective.

As you can see, there are many practices in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. I recommend that you do each one of them for some period of time. I cannot tell you what that period of time is. If you have a strong aversion

to the practice, then drop it. This happens most notably with the corpse contemplations. Remember, the goal here is not to make more suffering for yourself. Put it aside for now. But remember that this is an important area for you to revisit. A strong aversive reaction shows that this is an area where you need work, and when you feel able you should come back to it, to push against the edge of your practice. Investigate why you are having this reaction.

This is why it is important to begin your career as a meditator by establishing a sense of well-being. You are going to confront some difficult topics. But you can always return to a place that feels safe and comfortable. Just go back to the breath and the feeling of comfort that it provides.

If you find a practice useful and fruitful, continue to do it. (This does not necessarily mean that it will be easy.) You can do this in a number of ways. You can do it as your main practice. You can do it for one sitting here or there. You can do it for part of your sitting. Experiment and see what yields the best results. This is a skill. You are learning techniques, and then you will have to use your discernment to determine when to use a specific technique.

You may also have a neutral response to it. In that case try to do it for a few sittings to become familiar with it, then put it aside.

For every practice you learn, you will have one of the following responses to it:

1. It will be useful to you now and in the future.
2. It will be useful to you now but not in the future. At some point it will stop being fruitful.
3. It will not be useful to you now, but will be useful to you in the future.
4. It will not be useful to you now or in the future.

Work formally with them. Stick with one that is productive for you. Put aside anything that is too disturbing and come back to it when you are

ready.

The First Foundation - the Body

In the West we are particularly disconnected from our bodies. To progress in meditation, we need to connect with the mind and body. What happens in the body manifests in the mind, and what happens in the mind manifests in the body. If you feel an unpleasant sensation the mind can spin it into something painful. If the mind feels stress your body will tense up. When you get a massage the mind calms down. The mind and body are inextricably bound. The practices in *The Little Book of Buddhist Meditation* such as sweeping and whole body breath awareness develop the connection between body and mind.

Most people either like their bodies or don't like their bodies. In either case you identify with the body as "me." If you like your body you think "I am attractive." If you do not like your body you think "I am unattractive." If the body is sick we say "I am sick," and if we are healthy we say "I am healthy." Thus several body practices are aimed at dis-identifying with the body as "me." The body is simply the body, as the Buddha says, "in and of itself."

Attachment to the body causes a great deal of suffering. A multi-billion dollar industry is devoted just to fingernails: \$7.47 billion in 2013. Most of the Buddha's disciples were young men. They had a great deal of sense desire and as a result a great deal of suffering. The Buddha was particularly keen to help his disciples see the body in a more balanced way.

The objective is to really see the body as it really is. It's a living, breathing organism. It is the home to our minds. But it is also impermanent. It will die. It is also made of basic elements, just as all things in the universe are. When the body dies, these elements return to their natural state.

It is important when looking at the body practices to remember that these are antidotes to a distorted view of the body. Which practice is most

helpful for you depends on what kind of distortion that is. If you are attached to your body, you need ways to disconnect from that attachment.

To that end, the Buddha sometimes used harsh language to describe the body:

“Behold this body - a painted image, a mass of heaped up sores, infirm, full of hankering - of which nothing is lasting or stable!

“Fully worn out is this body, a nest of disease, and fragile. This foul mass breaks up, for death is the end of life.” - [Dhp 147-148]

Obviously, thinking of the body in this way is a stark reminder of the realities of physical existence.

For some people, however, the relationship to the body is negative. In order to do this practice, you need a positive self image. That may sound funny in a path that teaches detachment and non-identification, but this is a process. If you have a negative self view, you must first develop a positive self view. Then you can work on no self view.

The Buddha often pointed out that the body is a powerful doorway to practice. Indeed, as we will see later, the body can be an entire path to awakening:

“Bhikkhus, when one thing is developed and cultivated, the body becomes tranquil, the mind becomes tranquil, thought and examination subside, and all wholesome qualities that pertain to true knowledge reach fulfillment by development. What is that one thing? Mindfulness directed to the body. When this one thing is developed and cultivated, the body becomes tranquil... and all wholesome qualities that pertain to true knowledge reach

fulfillment by development.” - [AN 1.583]

And then there is a balanced, somewhat clinical view of the body:

“Reflecting wisely, [a bhikkhu] uses almsfood neither for amusement nor for intoxication nor for the sake of physical beauty and attractiveness, but only for the endurance and continuance of this body, for ending discomfort, and for assisting the holy life, considering: ‘Thus I shall terminate old feelings without arousing new feelings and I shall be healthy and blameless and shall live in comfort.’” - [MN 2.14]

There is an interesting conversation in the *Milindapañha: The Questions of King Milinda* that records a conversation between King Milinda and the Buddhist sage Nāgasena about how disciples of the Buddha relate to the body:

The king asked: “Is the body dear to you recluses?”

“No, it is not.”

“But then, why do you look after it, and cherish it so?”

“Has Your Majesty somewhere and at some time in the course of a battle been wounded by an arrow?”

“Yes, that has happened.”

“In such cases, is not the wound anointed with salve, smeared with oil, and bandaged with fine linen?”

“Yes, so it is.”

“Then, is this treatment a sign that the wound is dear to Your Majesty?”

“No, it is not dear to me, but all this is done to it so that the flesh may grow again.”

“Just so the body is not dear to the recluses. Without being attached to the body they take care of it for the purpose of making a holy life possible.”

- [Milindapañha, The Arahants and Their Bodies]

Remember that these instructions are antidotes to a problem. If you have a lot of attachment to the body, you need to see its limits. If your body view is negative, you need a positive antidote. And finally you see the body for what it really is, with pluses and minuses, important uses as well as limitations.

A soldier in the cavalry has his horse. He cares for that horse and depends for his life on it. But he never thinks, “This horse is me, this horse is who I am.” This is the proper attitude to take towards the body.

1. Mindfulness of Breathing

“And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu abide contemplating the body as a body? Here a bhikkhu, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, sits down; having folded his legs crosswise, set his body erect, and established mindfulness in front of him, ever mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out. Breathing in long, he understands: ‘I breathe in long’; or breathing out long, he understands: ‘I breathe out long.’ Breathing in short, he understands: ‘I breathe in short’; or breathing out short, he understands: ‘I breathe out short.’ He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body’; he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body.’ He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in tranquilizing the

bodily formation’; he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out tranquilizing the bodily formation’; he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out tranquilizing the bodily formation.’ Just as a skilled lathe-operator or his apprentice, when making a long turn, understands: ‘I make a long turn’; or, when making a short turn, understands: ‘I make a short turn’; so too, breathing in long, a bhikkhu understands: ‘I breathe in long’...he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out tranquilizing the bodily formation.’

“In this way he abides contemplating the body as a body internally, or he abides contemplating the body as a body externally, or he abides contemplating the body as a body both internally and externally. Or else he abides contemplating in the body its nature of arising, or he abides contemplating in the body its nature of vanishing, or he abides contemplating in the body its nature of both arising and vanishing. Or else mindfulness that ‘there is a body’ is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body.”

- [MN 10.4-5]

This is perhaps the most important and fundamental practice in all of meditation. This is also a dense passage so let us take some time to break it down.

This passage is missing in the Ekottarika-āgama version of the sutta. It is hard to know why that might be and I will not speculate. But as I said this is the most fundamental practice in meditation. This passage is treated in more detail in the next sutta we will look at, the “Ānāpānasati Sutta: Mindfulness of Breathing” [MN 118].

This is the practice that we are doing. We have added some extra practices to facilitate the body practice, but they all fall under this umbrella. As we see in the first passage we do the following steps:

1. Establish the physical and mental posture.
2. Attend to the breath, following it all the way in and all the way out.
3. See the differences in the quality of the breath. See when the in-breath is short or long. See when the out-breath is short or long. More generally notice all the qualities of the in-breath and out-breath. Sometimes the breath is coarse and uneven. Sometimes it is smooth as silk. In high levels of concentration it can simply disappear.
4. Expand the awareness of the breath to the whole body, just as we have learned. Feel the breath energy in the whole body.
5. Now calm and tranquilize the body. The sweeping practice is very good for helping us learn how to do this.

In the next paragraph we are invited to expand our mindfulness of breathing to do several things:

1. Use the breath to contemplate the whole body internally. This means to look at our whole body in a general way, to become familiar with all phenomena as they relate to our bodies.
2. Expand that awareness to the bodies of others. This is akin to body language. See those same phenomena in others.
3. Now see those same phenomena both in our bodies and in the bodies of others. See how they are the same or different.
4. See the arising and passing away of those phenomena. The breath arises and passes away as do all physical phenomena, like waves on the ocean.
5. Be aware of the body "in the body," that is, without adding anything to it. Be aware of the body purely as it exists. It is simply "this body."
6. Now comes the hard part: abide in the body without clinging.

More clinging = more suffering; less clinging = less suffering, no clinging = no suffering.

2. Mindfulness of Postures

“Again, bhikkhus, when walking, a bhikkhu understands: ‘I am walking’; when standing, he understands: ‘I am standing’; when sitting, he understands: ‘I am sitting’; when lying down, he understands: ‘I am lying down’; or he understands accordingly however his body is disposed.

“In this way he abides contemplating the body as a body internally, externally, and both internally and externally... And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That too is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body.

“Again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu is one who acts in full awareness when going forward and returning; who acts in full awareness when looking ahead and looking away; who acts in full awareness when flexing and extending his limbs; who acts in full awareness when wearing his robes and carrying his outer robe and bowl; who acts in full awareness when eating, drinking, consuming food, and tasting; who acts in full awareness when defecating and urinating; who acts in full awareness when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent.

“In this way he abides contemplating the body as a body internally, externally, and both internally and externally... And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in

the world. That too is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body.” - [MN 10.6-9]

(Note: In Ajahn Anālayo’s analysis this section has two parts: postures and activities. I conflated them into one.)

Like so many of the practices this one is easy to understand and hard to do. The Buddha is instructing us to be aware at all times of our body. Know when we are walking. Know when we are standing. Know when we are sitting. Know when we are lying down.

You may think that you do know these things, but that is hardly ever the case. The mind is always somewhere else, planning, fantasizing, dreaming, and thinking about the past. This is how we bump into doors and drive off the road. We are simply not paying attention.

One way to work with this practice is to pick a specific time to practice body awareness. When you get up in the morning, pay particular attention to your body position as you go through your morning routine. You can use a noting word to bring that attention to the foreground. Note “walking” silently to yourself when you are walking. Note “standing, standing” when you are brushing your teeth. This brings you back here to this present moment.

And once again the Buddha instructs us to know the postures in our own bodies, the bodies of others, and the bodies of ourselves and others. Know the body simply as the body, without adding anything else to it. It is just this body or that body, walking, standing, sitting, or lying down.

Extend this awareness to everything that you do. When you move your arm know that you are moving your arm. There was once a monk who was giving a Dharma talk. Suddenly he stopped talking, pulled his arm into his body, and then extended it back out. When someone asked him what he was doing, he said that he had reflexively and unmindfully moved his arm during the talk, so he went back and repeated that motion with mindfulness.

And finally there is that word again, clinging: “he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world.” This is awareness of the body at all times but without attachment and without adding anything to it. This is the meaning of “the body as a body.”

3. Mindfulness of the Body Parts

“Again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu reviews this same body up from the soles of the feet and down from the top of the hair, bounded by skin, as full of many kinds of impurity thus: ‘In this body there are head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints, and urine.’ Just as though there were a bag with an opening at both ends full of many sorts of grain, such as hill rice, red rice, beans, peas, millet, and white rice, and a man with good eyes were to open it and review it thus: ‘This is hill rice, this is red rice, these are beans, these are peas, this is millet, this is white rice’; so too, a bhikkhu reviews this same body...as full of many kinds of impurity thus: ‘In this body there are head-hairs...and urine.’

“In this way he abides contemplating the body as a body internally, externally, and both internally and externally... And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That too is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body.” - [MN 10.10-11]

Lest there be any confusion about the point of this exercise, this section is subtitled “Foulness (of the body parts).” This practice is designed to

reduce clinging and attachment to our bodies as well as the bodies of others. The next time you see someone who you find attractive, contemplate his or her body in this way. Those beautiful eyes? Imagine they have been removed and are lying on the table. That beautiful skin? Mentally peel it off and see what is underneath.

Clearly you must do this practice thoughtfully and wisely and not with aversion. If aversion is a problem, return to the pleasantness of the breath or switch to mettā practice.

In the “Vesali Sutta: At Vesali” [SN 54.9] the Buddha encouraged his monks to contemplate the foulness of the body. The Buddha then went into seclusion. During the Buddha’s time in seclusion many monks committed suicide because they were so disgusted by their bodies. Please, don’t do that.

When the Buddha emerged from seclusion he asked why the community of monks was “so diminished.” When they told him what happened, he repeated the instructions in the first section on body practice. He encouraged them to do what I am encouraging you to do, and that is to go back to the breath and a sense of well-being:

“It is in this way, bhikkhus, that concentration by mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated so that it is peaceful and sublime, an ambrosial pleasant dwelling, and it disperses and quells on the spot evil unwholesome states whenever they arise.” - [SN 54.9]

This practice on the foulness of the body needs a foundation of calm, tranquility, serenity, and well-being. Then you can see into the nature of the body.

Bhikkhu Bodhi says that in Sri Lanka the medical examiners know about this practice, and they let the monks sit in while they do autopsies. That is one way to think about it, the way a doctor would.

There is a logistical problem with this practice and that is simply remembering the body parts. You can use a cheat sheet and keep it in front of you while you are meditating. And it is not so important that you remember every body part exactly as it is in the sutta.

Another way to do this practice is with a guided meditation. There is good one by the Buddhist nun Ayya Khema (Internet search: "[body parts ayya khema](#)").

Doing this practice without aversion is very helpful in reducing bodily attachment. It is also helpful when sensual desire arises. Remember its purpose. It is an antidote to bodily attachment and to sense desire. This practice will be most helpful if you think that you are attractive or if you have a lot of sexual desire.

(Having said that, being characteristically out of step, sometimes when I do this practice I am struck by what an amazing mechanism the human body is. I have had my share of physical problems and sometimes it seems like the body never works properly. But when I do this practice it seems like a miracle that the thing ever worked to begin with.)

4. Mindfulness of the Elements

“Again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu reviews this same body, however it is placed, however disposed, by way of elements thus: ‘In this body there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element.’ Just as though a skilled butcher or his apprentice had killed a cow and was seated at the crossroads with it cut up into pieces; so too, a bhikkhu reviews this same body... by way of elements thus: ‘In this body there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element.’

“In this way he abides contemplating the body as a body

*internally, externally, and both internally and externally...
And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in
the world. That too is how a bhikkhu abides
contemplating the body as a body.” - [MN 10.12-13]*

Another way to contemplate the nature of the body is even more basic than the body parts, and that is the four elements. There is more wisdom to this than may be apparent to a modern reader. At first glance it may look like ancient alchemy. But the four elements represent qualities of our bodies that are true for all objects in the universe. Further, they represent a way in which we experience the world.

The four elements are:

1. **The earth element**, or solidity.
2. **The water element**, or liquidity. In ancient India, the water element was also seen as having the property of cohesion, or binding, in the sense of how water acts as a binding agent in dough.
3. **The fire element**, or heat. The fire element also has the sense of energy.
4. **The air element**, or wind. The air element also has the property of movement.

You can see and feel all these elements in your own body. When you sit on the cushion, you feel the solidity of your body as it rests on the cushion. In your mouth you feel saliva, you feel the blood pumping through your body. This is the water element. The heat in your body is the fire element. The breath is the air element. The movement of the body is also the air element.

This practice is particularly interesting when you practice “internally and externally.” Now you do not even need another body to see the same phenomena externally. The solidity of your body is the same property as the solidity of the floor and the earth. The liquidity of your body is the same as the rivers, streams, and oceans. The heat element is the same as

the heat from the sun or a fire. The wind element is the same as the wind itself. Your body has the same nature as nature itself. And when you die those elements will not disappear, they will simply go back to being part of the cosmos.

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

- [King James Bible, Genesis 3:19]

One way to work with this practice is to take each element and then see that element in your life. It may be something happening right now or something that happened in the past. Then see how it is the same. If you are sitting on the floor see and feel the solidity in your body, and then see and feel it in the floor or the cushion. See if you can dissolve the boundary between the two so that there is only "solidity."

Now move on to the water element. See the water element around you or in a place where you have experienced the water element. Think of rivers, streams, the ocean, anywhere where the water element exists. See the water element in your body and see how it is the same inside and out, internally and externally. You can also look at the elements in your body and the bodies of others, people and animals. It is the same element. See if you can dissolve the boundary.

Then look at the fire element. Imagine the sun bathing you in warmth. Feel the coolness of the shade. Feel the warmth of another. Dissolve the boundary between the warmth and energy around you and that in your body.

The air element is everywhere. We cannot live without it. A tiny portion of the earth's atmosphere is always inside of our lungs. Some of it is inside of our mouths. It is the same air, inside and out. The air element binds us to the earth's atmosphere. When the wind blows we feel its movement on our skin. When we move we feel that movement also, even

if the air is still.

In some places in the Pāli Canon [DN 33, MN 140, SN 27.9] the Buddha described two additional elements, space and consciousness. We know from science that even our apparently solid bodies are mostly empty space. Unlike some of the other elements, space is literally everywhere. The space in our bodies is the same space that stretches out to the limits of the universe. One of the formless attainments is the infinity of space, where the boundary between the space within you and outside of you disappears.

All of these five elements would not comprise a human being without the consciousness element. As with the space element, consciousness is infinite. Another of the formless attainments is the infinity of consciousness, where the boundary between your “limited” consciousness and infinite consciousness disappears. Infinite consciousness is the consciousness that is aware of infinite space.

Another way to practice with the elements is when you feel stress. If you are arguing with someone or you are upset by a news story, look into the elemental nature of your body and mind. See yourself as these elements. Then ask yourself, who is upset? What is upset? How are these elements being threatened?

It took me a long time to benefit from this meditation. This is very common in meditation practice, and this is why you need to return to practices that did not seem useful before. There is always something new to learn. That is what meditation practice is all about. Of course sometimes the mind is not ready for a lesson. You don't start learning mathematics by taking Calculus. When the mind is ready, it will let you know.

Meditation is a lifelong activity. The Buddha did not stop meditating after he awakened. This practice is like science. A scientist would never say, “OK. I'm done. We know everything.” There is always more to learn. Some arahants only work with the formless attainments after they

are fully awakened. Even for a Buddha there is more to learn.

In doing the research for this section, I ran into many teachings on this subject, and I thought most of them were very poor. Many of them are incredibly over-analyzed. Notice the Buddha's instructions at the beginning of this section. They are pretty simple. Do this practice and see what it yields for you. You may see things that are completely different than what I described. See what is true for you.

Ayya Khema has a good guided meditation on the elements (Internet search: "[four great elements ayya khema](#)"). Unfortunately it is cut short near the end, but of the many guided meditations that I have listened to on the elements, I think this is the best one.

5. The Corpse Contemplations

“Again, bhikkhus, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, one, two, or three days dead, bloated, livid, and oozing matter, a bhikkhu compares this same body with it thus: ‘This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate.’

“In this way he abides contemplating the body as a body internally, externally, and both internally and externally... And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That too is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body.

“Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, being devoured by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals, or various kinds of worms, a bhikkhu compares this same body with it thus: ‘This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not

exempt from that fate.'

"...That too is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body.

"Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, a skeleton with flesh and blood, held together with sinews... a fleshless skeleton smeared with blood, held together with sinews... a skeleton without flesh and blood, held together with sinews...

disconnected bones scattered in all directions-here a hand-bone, there a foot-bone, here a shin-bone, there a thigh-bone, here a hip-bone, there a back-bone, here a rib-bone, there a breast-bone, here an arm-bone, there a shoulder-bone, here a neck-bone, there a jaw-bone, here a tooth, there the skull-a bhikkhu compares this same body with it thus: 'This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate.'

"...That too is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body.

"Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, bones bleached white, the color of shells... bones heaped up...bones more than a year old, rotted and crumbled to dust, a bhikkhu compares this same body with it thus: 'This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate.'

"In this way he abides contemplating the body as a body internally, or he abides contemplating the body as a body externally, or he abides contemplating the body as a body both internally and externally. Or else he abides contemplating in the body its nature of arising, or he

abides contemplating in the body its nature of vanishing, or he abides contemplating in the body its nature of both arising and vanishing. Or else mindfulness that 'there is a body' is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That too is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body." - [MN 10.14-31]

These are also called the "cemetery contemplations."

This section is labeled "The Nine Charnel Ground Contemplations." In India at the time of the Buddha, if you could not afford a cremation, your body was thrown into a "charnel ground" and left to rot. This provided an opportunity (!) to see what happens to a human body after death. Some monks would spend time living in a charnel ground.

As you can probably guess this is a very challenging practice. Here we see the body in its barest form. For each of these last few practices - contemplation of body parts, the elements, and now the corpse contemplations - the main purpose is to see clearly the nature of the body. In doing that we may experience attachment and clinging, fear, and revulsion.

But imagine that you can really come to terms with those emotions. Imagine a life where you are free from fear. Imagine a life where you do not cling to your physical form, your body. Imagine a life where you can look at a corpse and see it with clarity but without revulsion.

To do that you must have a very healthy attitude about life. Instead of being sucked into a whirlpool of negative emotions you can step back and view life from a greater perspective. You have to put your life into a larger space.

Here is where a belief in rebirth is very helpful. Rebirth is a topic that everyone must deal with and come to terms with on their own. I

practiced for 20 years before I dealt seriously with it, and I came to believe that it is true.

But I am not going to try to convince you of the truth of rebirth, at least not here. But a more incremental step is to posit that it may be true and to see what that does for your own personal health and happiness and for your practice. Seeing that your own actions influence your future rebirths is certainly an incentive to be serious about them. And it can also put this life and this body into a larger perspective. This can be particularly helpful when doing the cemetery contemplations.

According to the Buddhist tradition we have had limitless lives through limitless time. We have been men, women, strong, weak, every race, color and creed, animals, ghosts, gods, and so forth. We have been kind and cruel, loving and hateful, generous and stingy. It is all there. We have died and had our bodies wither away an infinite number of times. And so it will be again in this life.

The Buddha's path offers us two possibilities. The first is to be happier in this time and in future lifetimes. The second is to become free from the uncertainty and risk of the rounds of rebirth altogether.

So as you do these contemplations put them into the space of infinite time. It is like that New Yorker cartoon of the [New Yorker's view of the world](#) where New York is huge and way in the distance is this little island called "Japan." That is how we usually look at our lives. Our lives are like New York. Everything else is Japan.

But now zoom back with that lens. Make New York fit into a bigger space. What does your life - New York - look like from the moon? Mars? Pluto? This enormous, overwhelming thing we call "this very life" is now just one of very, very many.

This makes our current life both more and less important. It is more important because we have this priceless opportunity to practice, to make this life and future lives really count for something. It makes this life less important because this is not all there is. This life is part of a very,

very long continuum. In the scheme of things it will come and go, and this life will disappear in the vastness of time. Five lives from now what happens to this particular body will hardly seem relevant, like that toy we were so attached to as a child and now we can hardly remember.

As to the mechanics of doing this practice, it will be hard for most people to visualize the stages of corpse decomposition. Here are the stages as described by the Buddha:

1. "Furthermore, bhikkhus, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, one, two, or three days dead, bloated, livid, and oozing matter, a bhikkhu compares this same body with it thus: 'This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate.'"
2. "Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, being devoured by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals, or various kinds of worms, a bhikkhu compares this same body with it thus: 'This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate.'"
3. "Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, a skeleton with flesh and blood, held together with sinews..."
4. "Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, sinews...a fleshless skeleton smeared with blood, held together with sinews..."
5. "Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, a skeleton without flesh and blood, held together by sinews..."
6. "Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, disconnected bones scattered in all directions- here a hand-bone, there a foot-bone, here a shin-bone, there a thigh-bone, here a hip-bone, there a back-bone, here a rib-bone, there a breast-bone, here an arm-bone, there a shoulder-bone, here a neck-bone, there a jaw-bone, here a tooth, there the skull - "
7. "Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, bones bleached white, the color of shells..."

8. "Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, bones heaped up..."
9. "Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, bones more than a year old, rotted and crumbled to dust, a bhikkhu compares this same body with it thus: 'This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate.'"

(Note that in the initial quote some of the passages have been omitted. In the listing here they have been re-inserted.)

And here is the Reader's Digest version:

1. Body swollen
2. Body devoured by crows
3. Skeleton with flesh and blood
4. Fleshless skeleton smeared with blood
5. Skeleton without flesh and blood
6. Disconnected bones scattered in all directions
7. Bones bleached white
8. Bones heaped up
9. Bones turned to dust

On the Internet there are photographs of decaying corpses (Internet search: "[buddha cemetery contemplations](#)"). They do not map exactly to the stages of decay the Buddha described, but they are close. However - again - please use good judgment. This is a very advanced practice. The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta was addressed to a community of monks, people who had already made a big commitment to this practice. Even then, as we have seen, some of the Buddha's own monks became so repulsed by their bodies that they committed suicide.

This can be a very powerful practice. In Thailand you can buy photographs of decaying corpses. Monks often buy them and keep them with them. They may put a photograph on the table at mealtime. Although it may be counter-intuitive, this practice can help you to

overcome one of the greatest fears that people have, and that is the fear of death.

The Second Foundation of Mindfulness - Feelings

“And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu abide contemplating feelings as feelings? Here, when feeling a pleasant feeling, a bhikkhu understands: ‘I feel a pleasant feeling’; when feeling a painful feeling, he understands: ‘I feel a painful feeling’; when feeling a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, he understands: ‘I feel a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling.’ When feeling a worldly pleasant feeling, he understands: ‘I feel a worldly pleasant feeling’; when feeling an unworldly pleasant feeling, he understands: ‘I feel an unworldly pleasant feeling’; when feeling a worldly painful feeling, he understands: ‘I feel a worldly painful feeling’; when feeling an unworldly painful feeling, he understands: ‘I feel an unworldly painful feeling’; when feeling a worldly neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, he understands: ‘I feel a worldly neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling’; when feeling an unworldly neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, he understands: ‘I feel an unworldly neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling.’

“In this way he abides contemplating mind as mind internally, or he abides contemplating mind as mind externally, or he abides contemplating mind as mind both internally and externally. Or else he abides contemplating in mind its nature of arising, or he abides contemplating in mind its nature of vanishing, or he abides contemplating in mind its nature of both arising and vanishing. Or else mindfulness that ‘there is mind’ is

simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating mind as mind.” -
[MN 10.32]

Worldly feelings cause sense desire, and guarding the sense doors is a way to abandon it. Unworldly desire is to be cultivated. Unworldly pleasant feelings come from serenity. Unworldly unpleasant feelings motivate us to practice. It is the angst we feel because we feel stress and want to be free from it. Unworldly neutral feelings are the quality of equanimity, which is the primary factor of the fourth jhāna.

For pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings, each has a worldly aspect and an unworldly aspect. This makes for six types of feelings.

The practice of the second foundation of mindfulness is to be aware of feelings as they arise in the mind. Most of the time we are experiencing neutral worldly feelings. Become sensitive to that. When a pleasant feeling arises, see that. Likewise with unpleasant feelings. You can use a silent, mental label like “pleasant.” You can also see what the mind does with it. You can see how the mind takes pleasant feelings and turns them into objects of desire, and how it takes unpleasant feelings and turns them into objects of aversion.

You can either make this your main practice or make it part of a more general mindfulness. You may be doing breath practice, for example, and may notice the feeling tone of a sense contact. See it, and return to the breath. Or you may spend the entire sitting just noting feelings.

Likewise, for unworldly sensations, note them as well. In particular you may notice pleasant sensations like tingling, or a moment where the mind gets very quiet and serene. Let these feelings bathe the body.

You can also use this knowledge to cultivate the mind. If you feel unpleasant sensations, look at a place in the body that feels pleasant. If

the mind is too highly charged, look for a place that is neutral and more equanimous. That can make the mind calmer and bring the energy level down.

This sutta has many stock passages. Each of the practices in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta follows the same formula. The object of meditation is 1) to be contemplated internally, 2) externally, and 3) internally and externally. This contemplation is done, in this case, contemplating “feelings as feelings,” that is, with nothing added. This is sometimes translated as “feelings in and of themselves.”

The next step is 4) to see into the arising and passing away of the object, to see its transient nature. In the case of the body, it will grow old, die, and decompose. In the case of the breath, each breath has a beginning, a middle, and an end. In the case of feelings, they come and go like waves on the beach, one feeling giving way to the next.

This leads to the fifth step:

“Or else mindfulness that ‘there is mind’ is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world.”

Thānissaro Bhikkhu describes it this way:

This stage corresponds to a mode of perception that the Buddha in MN 121 (Cūlasuññata Sutta, The Shorter Discourse on Emptiness) terms “entry into emptiness”:

“Thus he regards it [this mode of perception] as empty of whatever is not there. Whatever remains, he discerns as present: ‘there is this.’”

This is the culminating equipoise where the path of the practice opens to a state of non-fashioning and from

there to the fruit of awakening and release.

- [Thānissaro Bhikkhu, *Maha-satipaṭṭhāna Sutta: The Great Frames of Reference*]

The Third Foundation of Mindfulness - Mind

“And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu abide contemplating mind as mind? Here a bhikkhu understands mind affected by lust as mind affected by lust, and mind unaffected by lust as mind unaffected by lust. He understands mind affected by hate as mind affected by hate, and mind unaffected by hate as mind unaffected by hate. He understands mind affected by delusion as mind affected by delusion, and mind unaffected by delusion as mind unaffected by delusion. He understands contracted mind as contracted mind, and distracted mind as distracted mind. He understands exalted mind as exalted mind, and unexalted mind as unexalted mind. He understands surpassed mind as surpassed mind, and unsurpassed mind as unsurpassed mind. He understands concentrated mind as concentrated mind, and unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated mind. He understands liberated mind as liberated mind, and unliberated mind as unliberated mind.

“In this way he abides contemplating mind as mind internally, or he abides contemplating mind as mind externally, or he abides contemplating mind as mind both internally and externally. Or else he abides contemplating in mind its nature of arising, or he abides contemplating in mind its nature of vanishing, or he abides contemplating in mind its nature of both arising and

vanishing. Or else mindfulness that ‘there is mind’ is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating mind as mind.” - [MN 10.34-35]

The Buddha here gave us mind states to note, most of which are paired:

affected by lust	unaffected by lust
affected by hate	unaffected by hate
affected by delusion	unaffected by delusion
contracted mind	
distracted mind	
exalted mind	unexalted mind
surpassed mind	unsurpassed mind
concentrated mind	unconcentrated mind
liberated mind	unliberated mind

Bhikkhu Bodhi says this about some of the terms:

The paired examples of citta (“mind states”) given in this passage contrast states of mind of wholesome and unwholesome, or developed and undeveloped character. An exception, however, is the pair “contracted” and “distracted,” which are both unwholesome, the former due to sloth and torpor, the latter due to restlessness and remorse. (Majjhima Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā explains “exalted mind” and “unsurpassed mind” as the mind pertaining to the level of the jhānas and immaterial meditative

attainments, and “unexalted mind” and “surpassed mind” as the mind pertaining to the level of sense-sphere consciousness.) “Liberated mind” must be understood as a mind temporarily and partly freed from defilements through insight or the jhānas. Since the practice of satipaṭṭhāna pertains to the preliminary phase of the path aimed at the supramundane paths of deliverance, this last category should not be understood as a mind liberated through attainment of the supramundane paths.

- [Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Majjhima Nikāya*, Introduction]

The Buddha told us to see when any of the three poisons are absent. Usually we look for what is there. In this case we are told to see what is missing. This is a key point. When the poisons are missing, this is a mind state to be cultivated. It is also a fruit of the practice. It is a reward. See when the practice is working and take satisfaction in that.

As we work toward attaining jhāna (meditative absorption), the experiences of the mind as exalted, unsurpassed, and liberated will take on more meaning. This is a sign that the practice is working. It may be inconsistent and sporadic but it is there. First you get that old truck started, and then you work on getting it to run smoothly.

As with feelings, you can note these states as they arise, or you can spend your entire sitting noting them. And as with the other foundations of mindfulness, you see them first “in and of themselves,” then “arising and vanishing,” and finally “with bare knowledge and mindfulness, not clinging to anything in the world.”

The Fourth Foundation of Mindfulness - Mind Objects

The fourth foundation of mindfulness is sometimes left untranslated as “dharma” (Pāli: dhamma). The word “dharma” has multiple uses. In its

most common use it literally means “doctrine.” More colloquially it means the teachings of the Buddha. In this context the convention is to capitalize it, a.k.a., “Dharma.”

In a larger sense the word “dharma” also means “how things are,” i.e., the nature of reality. In ancient India that would have also meant how to behave. You understand the world to be a certain way and then act in a way that is consistent with that understanding. If you think about it you can see that everyone has a dharma. Some dharmas are good and some of them are bad. This creates an interesting distinction. In the West we are used to talking about theists, atheists, and agnostics. But in India atheism and agnosticism are just different dharmas.

A third meaning for the word “dharma” is “phenomena.” Everything that arises and passes away is a “dharma.” When the mind is distracted, some sense event triggered the distraction. The distraction arises and passes away. This is a “dharma.”

The fourth foundation of mindfulness has the most differences in different versions of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. Two of the three versions list the hindrances. The Pāli version lists the Four Noble Truths. (This does not make any sense to me.) Two list the sense spheres, which I think belong to the teaching on “dependent co-arising.” The Pāli version also lists the aggregates, which also does not make sense to me.

What does make the most sense to me is the hindrances and the factors of awakening. The hindrances are “to be abandoned” and the factors of awakening are “to be developed.” And that is what I will concentrate on here.

1. The Hindrances

“And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu abide contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects? Here a bhikkhu abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects in terms of

the Five Hindrances. And how does a bhikkhu abide contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects in terms of the Five Hindrances? Here, there being sensual desire in him, a bhikkhu understands: 'There is sensual desire in me'; or there being no sensual desire in him, he understands: 'There is no sensual desire in me'; and he also understands how there comes to be the arising of unarisen sensual desire, and how there comes to be the abandoning of arisen sensual desire, and how there comes to be the future non-arising of abandoned sensual desire.'

"There being ill will in him... There being sloth and torpor in him... There being restlessness and remorse in him... There being doubt in him, a bhikkhu understands: 'There is doubt in me'; or there being no doubt in him, he understands: 'There is no doubt in me'; and he understands how there comes to be the arising of unarisen doubt, and how there comes to be the abandoning of arisen doubt, and how there comes to be the future non-arising of abandoned doubt.

"In this way he abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects internally, or he abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects externally, or he abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects both internally and externally. Or else he abides contemplating in mind-objects their nature of arising, or he abides contemplating in mind-objects their nature of vanishing, or he abides contemplating in mind-objects their nature of both arising and vanishing. Or else mindfulness that 'there are mind-objects' is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and

mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects in terms of the Five Hindrances.” - [MN 10.36-37]

(The hindrances are discussed in *The Little Book of Buddhist Meditation* in the section “Problems While Meditating.”)

Meditation is commonly taught as a neutral kind of experience, one where you simply note phenomena as they arise and pass away. There certainly is that aspect to meditation. As we have seen in the stock phrase, that is one of the practices that the Buddha advised us to do.

But that is just one aspect to meditation. If that is all there was you would simply note the arising and passing away of unskillful mind states. You would never develop the path. And as the Buddha told us, the path is to be developed:

“This noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering is to be developed.” - [SN 56.11]

Working with the hindrances is not simply a case of seeing them. To be sure, sometimes simply seeing will make them go away. If the hindrance is weak, that may happen.

But sometimes the hindrance is strong. We have to apply an antidote to the hindrance. Sometimes we have a “multiple hindrance attack.” Panic sets in. If the first thing you try does not work, try a different one. Walking meditation can help when there is a strong hindrance attack. As mentioned in the last section, you can find a place in the body that feels pleasant and let the mind settle there. Change your breathing. Make it slower and deeper or make it fast and shallow. Make it deep on the in-breath and short on the out-breath. Make it short on the in-breath and long on the out-breath. Invent a new kind of breathing. Practice mettā. Practice sweeping. Try breath counting. You have a lot of tools with which to work. And finally, if nothing else seems to work, then try to

simply watch it. Detach yourself from the experience as much as you can.

This is a skill. As the Buddha told us, the objective is to abandon the hindrances, not just be with them.

2. The Factors of Awakening

“Again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects in terms of the seven enlightenment factors. And how does a bhikkhu abide contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects in terms of the seven enlightenment factors? Here, there being the mindfulness enlightenment factor in him, a bhikkhu understands: ‘There is the mindfulness enlightenment factor in me’; or there being no mindfulness enlightenment factor in him, he understands: ‘There is no mindfulness enlightenment factor in me’; and he also understands how there comes to be the arising of the unarisen mindfulness enlightenment factor, and how the arisen mindfulness enlightenment factor comes to fulfillment arisen mindfulness enlightenment factor comes to fulfillment by development.

“There being the investigation-of-states enlightenment factor in him... There being the energy enlightenment factor in him... There being the rapture enlightenment factor in him... There being the tranquility enlightenment factor in him... There being the concentration enlightenment factor in him... There being the equanimity enlightenment factor in him, a bhikkhu understands: ‘There is the equanimity enlightenment factor in me’; or there being no equanimity enlightenment factor in him, he understands: ‘There is no

equanimity enlightenment factor in me'; and he also understands how there comes to be the arising of the unarisen equanimity enlightenment factor, and how the arisen equanimity enlightenment factor comes to fulfillment by development.

"In this way he abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects internally, externally, and both internally and externally... And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects in terms of the seven enlightenment factors." - [MN 10.42-43]

Of all the teachings of the Buddha I think that those on the factors of awakening are the least appreciated and the least often taught. In a nutshell, if you can abandon the hindrances and fully develop the factors of awakening, you will awaken, or at least on the cusp of it.

The seven factors are divided into three groups depending on the energy level of the mind and body. The factor that is useful regardless of the energy level is:

1. mindfulness

The factors that are most helpful when the mind is sluggish are:

2. investigation of states
3. energy
4. rapture

The factors that are most helpful when the mind is overly active are:

5. tranquility
6. concentration
7. equanimity

1. Mindfulness

If you have read the previous Little Books, you know a great deal about the Buddha's teachings. And now, perhaps, you can appreciate the true meaning of mindfulness. Meditation is purposeful activity. When you sit down, you "keep in mind" the foundation on which you practice, which is right view. You "keep in mind" the object of meditation, the practice that you are doing. And you "keep in mind" your own knowledge and experience, what has worked for you in the past and what has not worked for you. If you are "just sitting" you are doing what Thich Nhat Hanh calls "wasting your time on the cushion."

"He has learned much, remembers what he has learned, and consolidates what he has learned. Such teachings as are good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end, with the right meaning and phrasing, and which affirm a holy life that is utterly perfect and pure — such teachings as these he has learned much of, remembered, mastered verbally, investigated with the mind, and penetrated well by view." - [MN 108.15]

Meditation is not something you do while mentally making dinner reservations or reminding yourself to stop for milk on the way home. And it is not just watching the world go by, either. This is a training. Skillful mind states are to be developed; unskillful mind states are to be abandoned. Your intention must be wholesome. As the Buddha put it, your actions must be rooted in non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion. Your attention must be fully present, and you must bring energy and ardency to the fore. And for the countless times when those things do not come together and you have to remind yourself to come back to the breath, you do it with love and compassion for yourself. What you are doing has skill and merit.

A sense of humor helps, too.

(For a very complete description of right mindfulness, see Thānissaro Bhikkhu's book *Right Mindfulness*.)

2. Investigation of States

“Abiding thus mindful, he investigates and examines that [mind]state with wisdom and embarks upon a full inquiry into it. On whatever occasion, abiding thus mindful, a bhikkhu investigates and examines that state with wisdom and embarks upon a full inquiry into it-on that occasion the investigation-of-states enlightenment factor is aroused in him, and he develops it, and by development it comes to fulfilment in him.” - [MN 118.31]

This passage is rich with meaning. It starts with a context of having established mindfulness. Having done so one looks at the mind “with wisdom” and “embarks on a full inquiry into it.”

“With wisdom” means that we are investigating phenomena with the wisdom teachings as a foundation. The main wisdom teachings are the Four Noble Truths, dependent co-arising, karma, and the Three Marks of Existence: dukkha, impermanence, and non-self. It could also be one of the other teachings of the Buddha such as the Four Right Strivings, the qualities of mind in the Third Foundation of Mindfulness, and so forth.

One way to work with this factor is in a formal way. For example, you can work with impermanence, watching thoughts and feelings arise and pass away. You can also see that these phenomena are not self. When the causes and conditions are sufficient, they arise, and when those causes and conditions are no longer present, they fade away.

You can also use your awareness to bring balance to the mind. Meditation is very much about balance and calibration. Is the mind sluggish? Focused? Calm? Serene? Do you need to make an adjustment?

Does the mind need more energy? Less? Does the mind need anything? Perhaps it is focused, calm, and steady. If it is, keep it there.

We can ask questions. What is going on? What activity asserts itself most strongly? Do we keep coming back to the same thought over and over again? What is that all about?

In addition to working with this factor in a formal way, it will also arise naturally. Suddenly what is going on in the mind becomes really interesting.

Once when I was on retreat I had a lot of hip pain. But I was pretty focused at the time, and I started watching the sensations in the hip. I started watching the sensations come and go and move around. When the bell rang to end the session, I was so wrapped up in what I was seeing that I just kept sitting.

This is investigation-of-states.

3. Energy

“In one who investigates and examines that state with wisdom and embarks upon a full inquiry into it, tireless energy is aroused. On whatever occasion tireless energy is aroused in a bhikkhu who investigates and examines that state with wisdom and embarks upon a full inquiry into it - on that occasion the energy enlightenment factor is aroused in him, and he develops it, and by development it comes to fulfillment in him.” - [MN 118.32]

This sense of inquiry leads to energy.

Energy is a fascinating topic in Buddhist practice. I once read about a

Buddhist monk who did not sleep for several years. The Buddha himself is said to have only slept one hour a night. When I first heard these stories, I thought they were urban legend.

But then I went on a long retreat, and by the end of it I was only sleeping six hours a night. I had always needed at least eight hours of sleep a night and often more. I had plenty of energy, but I was concerned because the retreat was ending. I had a long drive ahead of me the next day and work the day after that.

It turned out I was fine. I drove home, and even stayed up late that night and was up early the next morning.

One of my favorite Buddhist monks only sleeps two hours a night. This shows the kind of power that a deep meditation practice can have. We spend so much of our lives under stress that when that stress is greatly reduced all kinds of things become possible.

Keep the energy balanced. Too much energy is the hindrance of restlessness. Too little is the hindrance of sloth.

Use common sense when dealing with your energy level. When you are restless consider what you can do about it. Sometimes deep breathing helps. Sometimes short breaths help.

If you are working with a high energy practice like investigation-of-states, switch to something more calming. Sweeping may help. Simply following the breath may help. Finding your "beautiful breath" may help. Ask yourself, what kind of breathing would feel really good right now?

There may be tension in one part of the body causing restlessness. Try breathing into that area. You can change postures. Some people consider changing postures to be a mortal sin, but if it is done mindfully and in service to your practice it can be very helpful.

Walking meditation usually works well. And while walking, try different

paces. If you feel sluggish, start with fast walking. If you are restless, sometimes fast walking works well, and sometimes slow walking works. See what works for you.

There is a related subject to energy and that is how long you sit. The convention is to sit for 45 minutes or an hour and to walk for 30-45 minutes.

But during the Buddha's time they did not do this. They would simply meditate. And there are monasteries that follow the old convention. The meditation period is several hours long. You sit when you want, and you walk when you want. Personally I prefer this style. Granted, it can cause some distractions for the other people in the retreat, so you need to move quietly so you do not disturb them.

The advantage to this approach is that it is another way to learn. You may think that three hours is forever, but you may be surprised at how long you can sit with practice and training. I know people who sit this long and longer. And it is actually quite interesting to see the ebbs and flows of the mind over a longer period of time. When you sit 45 minutes, it is like a short story. When you sit for several hours, it is like a novel.

There is no right or wrong way. You do what works for you. But consider a different way to practice, one that may have some additional challenges but also some additional benefits. If you think you cannot do something, you never will.

Ultimately, it is up to you to use your wisdom and your own practical understanding of your own mind. No one knows your mind as well as you do. And if you need to splash some water on your face or get some sleep, then trust your own discernment and your own best judgment.

4. Rapture

"In one who has aroused energy, unworldly rapture

arises. On whatever occasion unworldly rapture arises in a bhikkhu who has aroused energy - on that occasion the rapture enlightenment factor is aroused in him, and he develops it, and by development it comes to fulfillment in him.” - [MN 118.33]

“Pīti” is the Pāli word that is translated here as “rapture.” It is also sometimes translated as “joy.” But the literal translation is not as important as the experience of it. Pīti is the technical term for an experience that is the most prominent factor of the first jhāna. Note that the Buddha used the phrase “unworldly rapture,” thus we know this means jhāna, or “meditative absorption.”

The practice of jhāna is where we are headed. As the mind becomes ever more calm, the thought-making process will slow down, and thoughts will become a mere whisper. This will manifest in the body as an energy flow. You may feel tingling and pleasant sensations. This will flood over the whole body. This is the experience of pīti in the first jhāna. It is one of the fruits of practice.

Some schools of Buddhism shy away from discussions of rapture, serenity, joy, and many of the wonderful experiences that you can have as your practice develops. But the Buddha often talked about these qualities, and you should pay attention to them when they arise.

These are the fruits of the hard work that you are doing. It would be a deadly miserable task to do all that hard work without getting some rewards along the way. Fortunately there are rewards, and they can be really wonderful. Acknowledge them. Cultivate them. Don’t just let those moments come and go without truly enjoying the “pleasure born of seclusion.”

There is a wonderful sutta in the *Udana* about bliss. It is about a monk named “Bhaddiya.”

Bhaddiya was apparently a royal governor or something like that before

he become a monk. He felt such joy in the homeless life that one night as he was meditating he started to exclaim, "What bliss! What bliss!" But the other monks misunderstood why he was saying this. They thought that he missed his old life as a rich and powerful man:

A large number of monks heard Ven. Bhaddiya, Kāḷigodhā's son, on going to the wilderness, to the root of a tree, or to an empty dwelling, repeatedly exclaim, "What bliss! What bliss!" and on hearing him, the thought occurred to them, "There's no doubt but that Ven. Bhaddiya, Kāḷigodhā's son, doesn't enjoy leading the holy life, for when he was a householder he knew the bliss of kingship, so that now, on recollecting that when going to the wilderness, to the root of a tree, or to an empty dwelling, he is repeatedly exclaiming, 'What bliss! What bliss!'" - [Ud 2.10]

So they went to the Buddha and told him that Bhaddiya was falling down on the job:

"There's no doubt but that Ven. Bhaddiya doesn't enjoy leading the holy life, for when he was a householder he knew the bliss of kingship, so that now, on recollecting that when going to the wilderness, to the root of a tree, or to an empty dwelling, he is repeatedly exclaiming, 'What bliss! What bliss!'"

(If this makes the monks look like a bunch of busy-bodies who can't mind their own business, well, if the shoe fits and all that...)

So the Buddha went to Bhaddiya and asked him about this, to see if Bhaddiya really did miss his royal life. This is what Bhaddiya said:

"Before, when I was a householder, maintaining the bliss of kingship, lord, I had guards posted within and without

the royal apartments, within and without the city, within and without the countryside. But even though I was thus guarded, thus protected, I dwelled in fear — agitated, distrustful, and afraid. But now, on going alone to the wilderness, to the root of a tree, or to an empty dwelling, I dwell without fear, unagitated, confident, and unafraid — unconcerned, unruffled, my wants satisfied, with my mind like a wild deer. This is the compelling reason I have in mind that — when going to the wilderness, to the root of a tree, or to an empty dwelling — I repeatedly exclaim, ‘What bliss! What bliss!’”

This is not an easy path, but it has extraordinary rewards. Joy. Bliss. Rapture. Serenity. Equanimity. Happiness. Tranquility. Harmony. These rewards are all part of the “path to be developed.” They will make you a happier person. They will make you more skillful in the world. And when they happen, enjoy them.

5. Tranquility

“In one who is rapturous, the body and the mind become tranquil. On whatever occasion the body and the mind become tranquil in a bhikkhu who is rapturous - on that occasion the tranquility enlightenment factor is aroused in him, and he develops it, and by development it comes to fulfillment in him.” - [MN 118.34]

By now we are immersed in the world of jhāna, meditative absorption. Rapture is highly energized. Different people experience it differently. People who need this type of positive experience will have very strong rapture, perhaps overwhelmingly so. For others it will be more mild.

This highly energized state can be quite exhausting. It is like when you

laugh a lot. At first it feels good, but after a while you are just worn out.

In the first jhāna the hindrances disappear. You can look for them but you will not find them. To be sure, this is a conditioned state, so when you leave jhāna the hindrances will return. But it is a taste of the possibilities that come with a full awakening.

As for tranquility, in the Buddha's description of dependent co-arising, in the reverse chain - the one that leads to liberation - rapture is a "proximate cause" of tranquility:

"...with rapture as proximate cause, tranquility;" - [SN 12.23]

Here, the overly energized state of pīti fades. This leads to a much calmer state of mind. You may experience a profound stillness, contentment, and happiness:

Tranquility, by removing the subtle bodily and mental disturbances connected with gladness and rapture, brings the serene pleasure that prepares the mind for deepened concentration.

- [Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Majjhima Nikāya*, Introduction]

And that leads to the next factor of awakening...

6. Concentration

"In one whose body is tranquil and who feels pleasure, the mind becomes concentrated. On whatever occasion the mind becomes concentrated in a bhikkhu whose body is tranquil and who feels pleasure — on that occasion the concentration enlightenment factor is aroused in him,

and he develops it, and by development it comes to fulfilment in him.” - [MN 22.35]

Once again it is not entirely clear to me what the Buddha means here by concentration. However, as we have already seen the first and second jhānas in the previous factors of awakening, I believe that this refers to the third jhāna. Tranquility and pleasure are, indeed, factors of the third jhāna.

However, concentration as a factor of awakening might also mean any of the jhānas. In either case, the mind is steady.

And finally, concentration leads to the quality of equanimity, which is a factor of the third and fourth jhānas...

7. Equanimity

“He closely looks on with equanimity at the mind thus concentrated. On whatever occasion a bhikkhu closely looks on with equanimity at the mind thus concentrated — on that occasion the equanimity enlightenment factor is aroused in him, and he develops it, and by development it comes to fulfilment in him.” - [MN 22.36]

“Again, with the fading away as well of rapture, a bhikkhu abides in equanimity, and mindful and fully aware, still feeling pleasure with the body, he enters upon and abides in the third jhāna, on account of which noble ones announce: ‘He has a pleasant abiding who has equanimity and is mindful.’ This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Māra...

“Again, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and

with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the fourth jhāna, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity. This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Māra...” - [MN 26.36-37]

Equanimity is a liberated state. It is a taste of the promise of full awakening. The mind is free of the tug-of-war between craving and aversion. The mind can sit calmly in the midst of experience. You see how much stress craving and aversion create. And apropos of the need for sleep, once you are not spending your entire day burning up energy from stress, the mind does not need as much rest.

The fourth jhāna has only one quality and that is equanimity. As the Buddha described in the first quote here, when the mind is equanimous you can watch the concentrated mind. The process of concentration gets the mind still. And when the mind is still you can pull back just slightly and watch the concentrated mind. You can see increasingly subtle disturbances. When those disturbances come to a complete end, the mind is liberated. It is awake.

Mindfulness of Breathing

“Bhikkhus, when mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it is of great fruit and great benefit. When mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it fulfills the four foundations of mindfulness. When the four foundations of mindfulness are developed and cultivated, they fulfill the seven enlightenment factors. When the seven enlightenment factors are developed and cultivated, they fulfill true knowledge and deliverance.” - [MN 118.15]

The “Ānāpānasati Sutta: Mindfulness of Breathing” [MN 118] is the Buddha’s most complete discourse on meditation. (“Sati” is “mindfulness” in Pāli, “ānāpāna” means “breathing.”)

The Ānāpānasati Sutta is similar in form and structure to the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. Like the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta it has four main sections: the body, feelings, the mind, and “dhammas.” In the Ānāpānasati Sutta these sections are called “tetrads” because each one is a set of four contemplations. Thus there are 16 total contemplations in the sutta:

1. Contemplation of the body
 1. Breathing long
 2. Breathing short
 3. Experiencing the whole body
 4. Tranquilizing the bodily activities
2. Contemplation of feelings
 1. Experiencing rapture
 2. Experiencing pleasure
 3. Experiencing mental activities
 4. Tranquilizing mental activities
3. Contemplation of the mind
 1. Experiencing the mind

2. Gladdening the mind
3. Concentrating the mind
4. Liberating the mind
4. Contemplation of dharmas
 1. Contemplating impermanence
 2. Contemplating fading away
 3. Contemplating cessation
 4. Contemplating relinquishment

Before we go through each of these contemplations, I would like to emphasize some points made earlier. First of all, this list is given in a linear fashion, 1-16. That is one way to look at them and there is a certain value in doing them precisely in that order.

However, as has often been noted, the Buddha's teachings are holographic. You can start at any point in the Buddha's teachings and eventually you will cover everything (if you keep at it). In terms of practice you may find that suddenly one of these contemplations arises of its own accord, or in doing these practices you find one that is particularly helpful or useful.

Some people feel that it is important to do these in the order given. Others argue just as strongly that you should practice in a way that lets them arise naturally. Personally I think that both ways of practicing have value and both have weaknesses.

As to letting them arise naturally, I think it is very difficult to see them if you have not had some experience with them. It is worthwhile to spend a sitting doing each of the 16 contemplations for five or ten minutes. This helps you become familiar with all of them and helps to keep them fresh in your mind.

On the other hand sometimes one of them will arise. This happens on and off of the cushion.

For many years, I used to do each practice for one week during my morning sittings, although I conflated the first two. So for 15 weeks I

worked my way through all of the practices. You can also use a repeating countdown timer, and do each one for five minutes. And so on. Feel free to experiment.

Thus there are different approaches. The first is to use these practices in a linear, formal way. Do them 1-16 and see where that takes you.

Then there is the non-linear approach. You can just pick one contemplation and see what happens. Do it for one sitting, or a week, or a month, perhaps longer.

Or you can do the one that feels most useful in the moment. In order to do this, you watch the mind and bring discernment to the fore. You ask questions about what will be most useful at the moment.

This is an important teaching. If you do just two things in your practice, cultivate virtue and practice mindfulness with breathing, these will take you a very long way, perhaps even to a final awakening.

Breathing with the Body

“And how, bhikkhus, is mindfulness of breathing developed and cultivated, so that it is of great fruit and great benefit?”

“Here a bhikkhu, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, sits down; having folded his legs crosswise, set his body erect, and established mindfulness in front of him, ever mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out.

“Breathing in long, he understands: ‘I breathe in long’; or breathing out long, he understands: ‘I breathe out long.’ Breathing in short, he understands: ‘I breathe in short’; or breathing out short, he understands: ‘I breathe out short.’

He trains thus: 'I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body [of breath]'; he trains thus: 'I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body [of breath].' He trains thus: *'I shall breathe in tranquilizing the bodily formation'; he trains thus: 'I shall breathe out tranquilizing the bodily formation.'*" - [MN 118.16-17]

This passage should have a familiar feel to it by now. The four exercises here are as follows:

1. Know the short breath.
2. Know the long breath.
3. Experience the whole body.
4. Tranquilize the whole body.

The first two contemplations move from a simple awareness of breath, a change in focus that happens quite naturally. Most commentators agree it meant more than long and short here; he was talking about all the qualities of breath. As we become more familiar with breathing, we perceive subtle nuances in it.

Sometimes the breath is very fine, like silk or satin; it enters and exits freely. How wonderful just to be breathing! At other times it is coarse, more like burlap; it fights its way in out. Sometimes the breath is so deep and smooth that it affects the whole body, relaxing us profoundly. Other times it is so short and pinched, hurried and agitated, that our minds and bodies are like that, restless and uncomfortable.

- [Larry Rosenberg, *Breath by Breath*]

The first two contemplations are the only ones where the Buddha told us to simply be with the experience. In the third contemplation we expand

our field of awareness to encompass the entire body. This third contemplation has sometimes been called “the breath body.” What we are aiming at is not simply to experience the physical body but the entire energy field. What we nominally call the “breath” is really the breath energy. You can feel the breath energy anywhere in the body. You can breathe in and out through any place in the body. Try different spots in the body like the chakras to see which ones are most prominent for you.

As you work with this exercise, look for places where the breath energy feels blocked. The sweeping exercises are good for that. As you move through the body, breathe through any areas where there is stress or tension. Eventually the energy will flow freely and easily, and you will feel the breath energy field of the whole body on the in-breath and the out-breath.

Experiment with this. As you breath in, feel the breath energy fill the whole body. Then breathe out through one spot, or breathe out through the entire body. Feel the breath energy as a cocoon that envelops the physical body. A sense of ease and comfort will follow. When the breath energy flows through the entire body you fulfill the fourth contemplation. The body will be calm, and the mind will follow the ease of the body.

Breathing with Feelings

“He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in experiencing rapture’; he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out experiencing rapture.’ He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in experiencing pleasure’; he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out experiencing pleasure.’ He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in experiencing the mental formation’; he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out experiencing the mental formation.’ He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in tranquilizing the mental formation’; he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out tranquilizing the mental formation.’” - [MN 118.19]

In the first tetrad we calm the whole body, getting the field of breath energy to be open, feeling the whole breath body as it pulses in and out. When that happens, pleasant feelings will pervade the body. As you continue to breathe in and out, and as the pleasant sensations fill the whole body, and when the pleasant sensations are very strong, you enter the first jhāna.

The word “joy” (“rapture/bliss,” “pīti” in Pāli) is used in a number of contexts in the Buddha’s teachings. It is the primary factor of the first jhāna. It is a factor of awakening. It is a step in the reverse chain of dependent co-arising.

There is also the joy of doing the practice. There will be times when you feel almost overwhelming gratitude at finding the Buddha’s path and having the opportunity to practice it.

In ānāpānasati it is the fifth contemplation, the first one in the feelings tetrad.

Until you attain jhāna, the joy will be the joy of the practice. Your mind will be more settled. You will feel happier. Joy is an important part of the Buddha’s path.

Joy will eventually settle down into pleasantness or “happiness” (Pāli: sukka). There is serenity, peace, calm. And this is the next contemplation. The mind will be quieter. It may even become completely still. This happiness is the primary quality of the second jhāna. It may also be the quieter contentment of simply practicing the path.

These steps do not necessarily happen sequentially and they may happen in stages. With all of these practices simply do the best that you can. Here and there you will get a taste of the possibilities. You will have a brief moment where the body is calm and serene and the mind is quiet. This happens when you are not trying to make it happen. If you back off the conscious effort you will naturally fall into these states.

The next two contemplations follow the pattern of the first tetrad. In the

first tetrad we experienced the whole body and then calmed the whole body. Here we open to “mental formations.” Both Larry Rosenberg and Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu agree that what is meant here is the two aggregates of feelings (Pāli: vedanā) and perceptions (Pāli: sañña).

A good way to do the seventh contemplation is by sweeping. But in this case, instead of calming the body, note the feeling tone at each location. At the shoulder, what do you feel? Is it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral? Does it change from breath to breath? If it is unpleasant can you change your breathing to make it more comfortable?

Also see if there is any pīti or sukkha. Is there an “unworldly” pleasant sensation? And what does the mind do with these sensations?

Then see what the mind does with feelings. What comes next? See how the mind goes from sense input to feeling to perception to thought, and how the mind chooses to turn to a particular sense input before the feeling. There is a choice about what gets attention. Your mind cannot process every sense input so it chooses.

Watch for the process of perception. See how the mind takes the sense input and names it. Car. Airplane. Wind. Sometimes you will hear a common sound like a bird chirping and for just the slightest moment the brain cramps up and we don't recognize the sound. Our perception has taken a microscopically brief holiday. Then the mind snaps back and you think “bird” and for a moment you wonder what that was all about.

Another type of perception is judgment. The word “judgment” is a little problematic. There is, of course, good judgment, judgment that comes from wisdom and discernment. Then there is judgment that is hypercritical that turns everything into like and dislike, good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant. This is an excellent way to suffer. The less critical you are, the more you see things according to their characteristics, or, more precisely, how you experience those characteristics: hot and mild, sweet and sour, and so forth. This is a smoother path through life.

The objective in the eighth contemplation is to be aware of feelings and

perceptions and then to dial them back a bit, to soften them, to “tranquilize” them. Sweeping is also excellent for this step. The Buddha is walking us through a process of abandoning stress and agitation and toward a calmer, happier state of mind. Quietly your wisdom and the ability to discern grow as well. Insights - both mundane and transcendent - arise. It is like an agitated pond of water becoming still. The water becomes clear and you can see to the bottom.

“...there comes an occasion when [a bhikkhu’s] mind becomes internally steady, composed, unified, and concentrated. Then the path is generated in him. He pursues this path, develops it, and cultivates it. As he is pursuing, developing, and cultivating this path, the fetters are abandoned and the underlying tendencies are uprooted.” - [AN 4.170]

Breathing with the Mind

“He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in experiencing the mind’; he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out experiencing the mind.’ He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in gladdening the mind’; he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out gladdening the mind.’ He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in concentrating the mind’; he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out concentrating the mind.’ He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in liberating the mind’; he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out liberating the mind.’” - [MN 118.20]

The ninth contemplation is “experiencing the mind.” It is very powerful. Most people spend their lives without any awareness of what is going on in their minds. Life for them is a simple case of reactivity and habit. They never exercise any choice over what is arising in the mind.

The ninth contemplation invites us to look inward and watch what is going on. It is like standing aside by one step and watching our minds

from an objective perspective. We have already seen this in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta where the Buddha invited us to look at our minds and ask, “Where is the mind now?” Is there lust or not? Is there hatred/aversion or not? Is there delusion/confusion or not? Is the mind exalted, unsurpassed, concentrated, liberated?

Seeing the mind gives us an opportunity to break the habitual, reactive way in which we normally operate. Someone cuts you off in traffic. You see the anger arise and you can let it pass. You can see that you do not have to let the anger control what happens next. You may even be able to conjure up some love and compassion for the other driver. You can see how that person has to live with uncontrolled aggression, and how much stress that must cause them.

Another interesting question to ask is, “What is the mind telling me?” Our mind is like a dysfunctional committee. Which member is speaking at the moment? What is that committee member telling us? Is it working us into a frenzy over some imagined slight? Is it telling us to indulge our craving, our greed? Is it telling us to be patient, kind, and generous?

In the “Dvedhāvitakka Sutta: The Two Kinds of Thought” [MN 19] the Buddha describes a moment during his quest for awakening when he decided to divide his thoughts into two categories:

“Bhikkhus, before my enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened Bodhisatta, it occurred to me: ‘Suppose that I divide my thoughts into two classes. Then I set on one side thoughts of sensual desire, thoughts of ill will, and thoughts of cruelty, and I set on the other side thoughts of renunciation, thoughts of non-ill will, and thoughts of non-cruelty.’” - [MN 19.2]

You can think of this more generally as asking the question, “Is this thought of long term benefit to me and others?” If it is not, you should abandon it:

“This leads to my own affliction, to others’ affliction, and to the affliction of both; it obstructs wisdom, causes difficulties, and leads away from nibbāna. When I considered: ‘This leads to my own affliction,’ it subsided in me; when I considered: ‘This leads to others’ affliction,’ it subsided in me; when I considered: ‘This leads to the affliction of both,’ it subsided in me; when I considered: ‘This obstructs wisdom, causes difficulties, and leads away from nibbāna,’ it subsided in me.” - [MN 19.3]

Conversely, if the thought is of long term benefit to you and others, it should be developed and supported:

“This does not lead to my own affliction, or to others’ affliction, or to the affliction of both; it aids wisdom, does not cause difficulties, and leads to nibbāna.” - [MN 19.8]

This is a deeply profound insight by the Buddha, and it shows his pragmatism. He is asking a simple question, “Is this thought beneficial or not?”

Most people get hung up on the idea of right and wrong. The Buddha asked a very different question. Is this thought useful? Suppose all politicians in the world starting asking that question? Suppose instead of perpetuating fear and hatred generation after generation, arguing over old slights, real and imagined, they started asking where does that lead? What does it get you? The issue of right and wrong goes away.

This is a very powerful practice. Every so often when you can remember to do so, look at what you are thinking, and then ask yourself, “Is this thought of any benefit?” If it is not, then abandon it.

There are many aspects to this ninth contemplation. In addition to seeing the general state of the mind, you can look even more deeply into its processes. Watch your thoughts as they arise. With skill you can see them arise and pass away. You can learn to cut them off, stop them in mid-

track. Even prior to the thought you can see the energy that precipitates the thought, and then you can keep it from manifesting. You can see how energies in the body precipitate thoughts.

As this happens and as you get more skillful, you can depersonalize thinking. You see that thoughts are simply thoughts. They are not “me.” The mind has a mind of its own, but you do not have to be a slave to it. You don’t have to do what it is telling you to do.

With this contemplation, we can turn the old way of thinking and reacting into a more skillful process of thinking, seeing, and evaluating. Is this thought useful or not? Do I want to keep it and act on it or do I want to throw it away? We are beginning to reclaim control over our lives.

The Buddha was telling us to work with these mind states, cultivating the wholesome ones and abandoning the unwholesome ones. But many times we can’t do that - yet. And that is fine. Again, do not use this as an exercise in frustration. See the thought, and if it is unwholesome, see if you can work with it. But if you can’t right now, that is fine. Just seeing it puts you well ahead of the game. If all else fails then just be with it. This will at least take some of the energy out of it.

And on the positive side of things, you support and enhance the really good thoughts. You don’t let them pass you by. You see how much happier the mind is when it is working in a wholesome, virtuous way. These thoughts will manifest more and more, and your own happiness increases directly as a result. And this leads to the tenth contemplation, “gladdening the mind.”

When people are first introduced to the idea that you can make your mind happy, it usually raises a few eyebrows. The implication is that you can somehow turn on a switch and go from being stressed to happy. And that is pretty much what it is.

You should work with this exercise however it works for you. Here is what I have found in my practice. As you work with the breath, you find

a way of breathing that is calm and relaxed. That pleasant feeling permeates the whole body. And you can turn to that pleasant way of breathing whenever you want. This is insight working with concentration. You are more self-aware so you can see when the mind is in a negative, unwholesome mind state. Then you apply the pleasant breath, and you can immediately feel a slight uplifting in the mind. Everything relaxes a notch or two.

This also plays into dependent co-arising. You are catching the mind in a negative state. This prevents the mind from going into a negative feedback loop where the mind goes deeper and deeper into the abyss.

Gladdening the mind works very well off the cushion. During the day you can catch the mind in an unwholesome state and apply conscious breathing. Usually these are mildly negative states (a.k.a. “grumpy mind”), and being just mildly negative they lend themselves particularly well to uplifting.

It is difficult to do this if the mind is deeply anxious or very angry. But another benefit to what we are doing is that the strength and frequency of unwholesome states diminishes.

It is also worth saying something about deeply troubled states like depression. There are some teachers who think that meditation is a panacea for everything that ails you. They are particularly adamant about not using medications for psychological problems. I think this is a very dangerous position. Conditions like depression must be taken seriously. If you need medication or psychotherapy or whatever else is required, then do it.

Meditation is often used in the West as a form of psychotherapy. Depending on the issue, it can be helpful for that. But meditation and therapy have different aims. The purpose of therapy is to help people who are having trouble functioning in the world and making them functional. That is a noble goal. For people who are not functioning, becoming functional is extremely important.

But you can be functional and still have a lot of stress. The Buddha encouraged us to see the deeply rooted suffering caused by clinging. The purpose of meditation is to free you entirely from stress and suffering.

But you have to get there one step at a time. The Buddha taught “the gradual approach to awakening”:

The main paradigm for the gradual training found in the Majjhima Nikāya is that laid out in MN 27 and MN 51; alternative versions are found at MN 38, MN 39, MN 53, MN 107, and MN 125, and some of the more important variations will be briefly noted. The sequence opens with the appearance of a Tathāgata in the world and his exposition of the Dhamma, hearing which the disciple acquires faith and follows the Teacher into homelessness. Having gone forth, he undertakes and observes the rules of discipline that promote the purification of conduct and livelihood. The next three steps - contentment, restraint of the sense faculties, and mindfulness and full awareness - are intended to internalize the process of purification and thereby bridge the transition from virtue to concentration. Alternative versions (MN 39, MN 53, MN 107, MN 125) insert two additional steps here, moderation in eating and devotion to wakefulness.

- [Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Majjhima Nikāya*, Introduction]

You can see how his system of training proceeds step by step. This is growing a garden. Your practice will grow at its own pace, just as seeds grow and bear fruit as time and circumstances dictate. You start where you are, and if that means taking medication or going into therapy then that is what you do. Be your own best friend.

The next two steps are “concentrating the mind” and “liberating the mind.” Anytime the words “right concentration” are used, it means

jhāna. I think concentration here refers to the third jhāna, although it may mean any of the material jhānas. The reason I think this means the third jhāna is because we have already seen the first two jhānas. And the twelfth contemplation is liberating the mind. This as I understand it means the fourth jhāna. The primary quality of the fourth jhāna is equanimity, and equanimity is liberating.

However, even without being in a state of jhāna you can still work with these two exercises. Just get as concentrated as you can, and then focus on equanimity. See phenomena arise and let them be. Do your best not to chase after pleasure and to avoid pain.

Also, apropos of practicing without attaining jhāna, Larry Rosenberg translates the 11th contemplation as steadying the mind. That may be a more helpful way to think of it until you are able to attain jhāna.

By the time you have mastered the twelfth contemplation, the mind is well prepared to delve into dharmas.

Breathing with Dharmas

“He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in contemplating impermanence’; he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out contemplating impermanence.’ He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in contemplating fading away’; he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out contemplating fading away.’ He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in contemplating cessation’; he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out contemplating cessation.’ He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in contemplating relinquishment’; he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out contemplating relinquishment.’” - [MN 118.21]

*The Yaksa asked, “What is the most wonderful thing?”
Yudhisthira Maharaj replied, “The most wonderful thing is*

that although everyday innumerable humans and their animals go to the abode of death, still a man thinks he is immortal."

- [[Mahabharata, Meditation 128: The Lake of Death](#)]

Larry Rosenberg calls the fourth tetrad "breathing with wisdom." We are now in the realm of the transcendent teachings of the Buddha.

The thirteenth contemplation is impermanence, *annica*. This is the primary object of our meditation.

Everything in life is impermanent, yet we live as if that is not the case. We treat our thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and our bodies as if they have some permanent essence. Even our consciousness is conditioned and constantly changing. And trying to cling to something that is impermanent is like grabbing at a wave in order to stop from drowning.

In order to be free from the delusions of impermanence, we have to see deeply how it works and how our mind insists on clinging to impermanent things.

You can work with impermanence in many ways. In daily life you can begin to see the impermanence of everything. Your house? Will it be there in 100 years, 1,000 years? Your car, especially a new one? It is an old, beat-up car waiting to happen.

This is not intended to get you depressed. Just because a flower will only bloom for a short time doesn't mean that you can't enjoy it. In fact its impermanence is part of the joy. Enjoy the new car. Just know that in the ebb and flow of life, it will have its day, and then that day will be over.

The problem is clinging. If you let go of the clinging, you can still enjoy the new car. It is even more enjoyable because the enjoyment is not rooted in delusion.

Adapting to impermanence is like body surfing. You go with the flow -

literally. And this makes the dance of life less stressful. We stop pitting ourselves against the universe. Usually we are in contention with the world around us. That is like standing in the waves and letting them beat down on us. That is how we usually live. Body surfing is a lot more fun.

The Navajo have a lovely word: “hozhoni.” It is the beauty that comes from being in harmony.

We are born into this world, and someday we will die. That makes each moment even more precious. It is a reminder not to waste our time.

Another way to work with impermanence is to go back through the previous twelve contemplations and look at each one in terms of impermanence. Even the jhānas are conditioned. They arise and pass away. The breath arises and passes away. Thoughts arise and pass away. Feelings arise and pass away. You may recall that in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, for each Foundation of Mindfulness one of the instructions is to contemplate the arising and vanishing of each one. For the body:

“Or else he abides contemplating in the body its nature of arising, or he abides contemplating in the body its nature of vanishing, or he abides contemplating in the body its nature of both arising and vanishing.” - [MN 10.5]

Here we have a reformulation of the same exercise. The exercise here is to see everything in terms of its impermanence.

The next three contemplations are leading us step-by-step to final release, to final liberation, to freedom from suffering. Of course, that is a tall order and not likely to happen for some time. Still, you can get a taste of that freedom. You can “fake it until you can make it.” You can hover around that territory and maybe get a view from afar. In everything you have learned so far, this is the first time that we have broached the experience of awakening. It is now time to sniff around that territory and see what we can learn.

In order to see deeply into the impermanent nature of phenomena the mind, must be still. If the mind moves all the time you cannot see into the impermanence of phenomena. It is like trying to look through a vibrating telescope.

This stillness is deep and profound:

Try to be mindful, and let things take their course. Then your mind will become still in any surroundings, like a still forest pool. All kinds of wonderful animals will come to drink at the pool, and you will clearly see the nature of all things. You will see many strange and wonderful things come and go, but you will be still. This is the happiness of the Buddha.

- [Ajahn Chah, *A Still Forest Pool*]

This experience of stillness may feel a little frightening at first. It threatens the dysfunctional members of the committee. They can't go there, and they are going to resist. All of our neurotic conditions and habits are under attack, and they are not going to go lightly.

Tap into the feeling of deep inner peace that comes with this stillness. Play past any anxiety or fear that comes up and find the deep satisfaction in stillness. There is a deep, profound contentment there. Find it. Tap into it. Savor it.

Larry Rosenberg says that silence is very shy. It will go away at the slightest provocation. So we have to guard it like the rare jewel that it is. We have to create the space in which it can arise. Forceful effort will not work here. The effort must be very gentle and very soft. It is like enticing a wild animal to trust you enough to eat from your hand.

When you can do this, even for the briefest moment, you get a sense of the possibilities of this practice. Now you can see the futility of chasing after sense pleasures, which are completely unreliable.

In the “Māgandiya Sutta: To Māgandiya” [MN 75] the Buddha used the rather graphic simile of a leper who used coals from a charcoal pit to cauterize his sores. Later that leper became cured of his leprosy, and he saw another leper doing the same thing. The Buddha asked if the cured leper would envy the uncured leper for “his burning charcoal pit or his use of medicine?” (The answer is rhetorical.)

The Buddha went on with the simile:

“Suppose, Māgandiya, there was a leper with sores and blisters on his limbs, being devoured by worms, scratching the scabs off the openings of his wounds with his nails, cauterizing his body over a burning charcoal pit. Then his friends and companions, his kinsmen and relatives, brought a physician to treat him. The physician would make medicine for him, and by means of that medicine the man would be cured of his leprosy and would become well and happy, independent, master of himself, able to go where he likes. Then two strong men would seize him by both arms and drag him towards a burning charcoal pit. What do you think, Māgandiya? Would that man twist his body this way and that.” - [MN 75.15]

What the man at one time sought as a cure for his pain he now sees as painfully repulsive.

This is what we are aiming toward, to replace the crude, risky, and dangerous pursuit of sense pleasures with the “unworldly pleasure” of concentration and meditation. This is not the final goal, but it is an intermediate milestone on the path to awakening.

“So too, Māgandiya, in the past sensual pleasures were painful to touch, hot, and scorching; in the future sensual pleasures will be painful to touch, hot, and scorching; and

now at present sensual pleasures are painful to touch, hot, and scorching. But these beings who are not free from lust for sensual pleasures, who are devoured by craving for sensual pleasures, who burn with fever for sensual pleasures, have faculties that are impaired; thus, though sensual pleasures are actually painful to touch, they acquire a mistaken perception of them as pleasant.”
- [MN 75.16]

The fourteenth contemplation follows naturally as we see the futility of seeking happiness through what is inconstant and unreliable:

“Householder, suppose a vulture, a heron, or a hawk seized a piece of meat and flew away, and then vultures, herons, and hawks pursued it and pecked and clawed it. What do you think, householder? If that vulture, heron, or hawk does not quickly let go of that piece of meat, wouldn’t it incur death or deadly suffering because of that?”

“Yes, venerable sir.”

“So too, householder, a noble disciple considers thus: ‘Sensual pleasures have been compared to a piece of meat by the Blessed One; they provide much suffering and much despair, while the danger in them is great.’ Having seen this thus as it actually is with proper wisdom... clinging to the material things of the world utterly ceases without remainder.” - [MN 54.16]

In the fourteenth contemplation what is “fading away” is the craving, clinging, and dukkha.

There are two possible reactions to suffering in life. One is confusion and despair. The other is a determination to find a way out. You have a deep

conviction that there is a solution to the problem.

This is what the Buddha did. He left a life of luxury and endured countless, often excruciating experiences in order to find an answer. He had an unshakeable conviction that an answer existed. We have the benefit of his experience. He had to do it all on faith.

The inimitable Robert Thurman says, “Wouldn’t it have been a bummer if after all that effort the Buddha found out that ultimately life really is just hopeless?”

“...when the Buddha attained enlightenment, [it] means... that he came to understand the nature of reality precisely, exactly, and thoroughly.

“...[he could have] come to the exact understanding of reality and [gone], Oh no, what a bummer! Oh, that’s really awful! I mean, that’s what we might suspect reality is: a bummer. We’re all scared of that.

“So the discovery on which Buddhism is based is that the nature of reality itself is bliss: it is happiness. The world is made of happiness. It is the fabric of the world. Nirvāṇa of the Four Noble Truths: nirvāṇa is the one that is actually real.”

- [Robert Thurman, “[Aurora Forum at Stanford University, 24 April 2008](#)”]

All that we have done and all that we are doing is to see into the futility of clinging to what is impermanent, inconstant, and unreliable. The reason that it has taken us so long to discuss this topic, much less be able to realize it through direct experience, is because our conditioning and habits are so deeply ingrained the other way. What could be more obvious than the fact that good food, sex, happy relationships, lovely music, etc., are the keys to a happy life? This is a very hard sell. We have

to see deeply into why this is a bad strategy.

It isn't that you cannot enjoy these things. But if there is clinging and craving that is going to be a problem. And our mind has to be convinced that a) clinging to sense pleasures is a bad strategy and b) there is something better.

As our practice deepens, those sense pleasures are going to look less and less appealing. We are trying to grow up and mature and see a way of attaining happiness that is rooted in wisdom and skill. We are mastering the art of living.

As strategies for happiness go, this is the graded scale:

1. sense pleasures - poor
2. jhāna (meditative absorption) - better
3. nirvāṇa (nibbāna) - best

The more we see into the inconstancy of phenomena, the more the clinging will fade away. Cultivating the thirteenth contemplation will naturally lead to the fourteenth. Our clinging will fade away. We lose interest. The Buddha used the word "dispassion":

The last four contemplations are like the slow-motion movie. In actual practice, if you have been sitting long enough to reach this point, they might happen quite rapidly, because they're almost the same thing. The Buddha slows them down to see their subtle nuances. The key to them all is number thirteen. If you see into impermanence in a profound way, the others follow quite naturally.

The keyword in the fourteenth contemplation is rendered as "fading away," But the word in Pāli is "viraga" and is sometimes rendered "becoming dispassionate." Your passion to cling to things, to attached to them,

diminishes. The wording in the fifteenth contemplation is even more difficult. The Pāli word “nirodha” is sometimes used as a synonym for nirvāṇa. A literal translation would be “unbinding.” The unbinding of the mind from greed, hatred, and delusion. It denotes the distinguishing of the fire. This contemplation has to do with cessation, which can be seen in this context as a form of liberation.

- [Larry Rosenberg, *Breath by Breath*]

Cessation is not annihilation. What is ceasing is stress and suffering, a.k.a. dukkha. It is the Third Noble Truth. The cessation of stress comes in stages. It is not an all-or-nothing proposition. How much suffering ceases will depend on the depth of our practice. But once again we see how the path is not all-or-nothing. It happens gradually, i.e., the gradual training. This is good news. It means that you see how stress is lessening and happiness and liberation are increasing as your skill increases. It is a positive feedback loop.

Finally we reach the final step on the path, relinquishment. It is the process of letting go. You let go because there is nothing to hold on to.

What is there to let go of? you might ask, since the fifteenth contemplation saw the cessation of the formation. But in the fourteenth and fifteenth contemplations, it is still possible for a self to be present, watching these processes and taking credit for the wise discernment it sees with such subtlety and depth. In the sixteenth, that last vestige of self disappears and there is just the seeing. You relinquish any trace of ownership and give up any clinging whatsoever, even to the practice itself.

- [Larry Rosenberg, *Breath by Breath*]

The Buddha ended this discourse by describing how Mindfulness of Breathing fulfills The Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Seven Enlightenment Factors (*Seven Factors of Awakening*) and the “Fulfillment of True Knowledge and Deliverance.” I mention this because there are those who say that there is no relationship between the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta and the Ānāpānasati Sutta. They say that the similarities are coincidental. But not only can you see that there is a great deal of interweaving between the two, the Buddha himself stated that Mindfulness of Breathing fulfills The Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

The Buddha’s teachings are multi-dimensional. They are quite rich, and there is a temptation to over-simplify what he is trying to get us to “keep in mind.” This is one reason why the second factor of enlightenment - investigation and curiosity - is so important. Think of the thing that you find most interesting in life. You probably know a lot about it. You know a lot about it because you find it interesting.

When I was in high school I knew a group of guys who were pretty unengaged when it came to anything intellectual or academic. But when we hit our teenage years they got really interested in cars. They used to go to the local drag strip and race on Saturdays. Some of them raced stock cars. They could tell you anything about cars. They could rebuild transmissions and carburetors, they could bore out an engine block and put in bigger pistons, they knew how to make engines faster, they knew all the rules for sportsman and modified class stock cars, what you could and could not legally do to an engine. So how did this otherwise intellectually unengaged group get so knowledgeable and so highly skilled when it came to what is an amazingly complex machine, the automobile? They loved it. They were engaged. They were interested in everything about cars.

At times this practice may seem quite complex. But you do not have to be a geographer to make a trip across the country. You just have to know how to follow a map. You just have to follow the directions. This isn’t about having a high IQ. It is about having a big heart.

This principle was brought home to me some years ago when I taught a ten-week introduction to vipassana meditation. The group included two Ph.D.s with the special interest in Buddhism and an intense Marxist from Yugoslavia with a Ph.D. in political science. The Marxist made his attitude toward religion clear: it was a subject for idiots. He was learning meditation because his girlfriend had raved about it and he was afraid he'd lose her if he didn't show some interest. The Buddhists, on the other hand, were quite reverent.

At the end of the ten weeks, the Marxist had done beautifully, growing inwardly a great deal because he had followed the instructions and practiced every day. The Buddhist scholars, on the other hand, had gotten nowhere. They had tremendous interest in the Buddha's mind but very little in their own. The whole point of meditation was lost on them.

- [Larry Rosenberg, *Breath by Breath*]

3. Right Concentration

The Material Attainments

“And what, friends, is right concentration? Here, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. With the stilling of applied and sustained thought, he enters upon and abides in the second jhāna, which has self-confidence and singleness of mind without applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of concentration. With the fading away as well of rapture, he abides in equanimity, and mindful and fully aware, still feeling pleasure with the body, he enters upon and abides in the third jhāna, on account of which noble ones announce: ‘He has a pleasant abiding who has equanimity and is mindful.’ With the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, he enters upon and abides in the fourth jhāna, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity. This is called right concentration.” - [MN 141.31]

At the heart of the Buddha’s training is the practice of “jhāna,” or “meditative absorption.” It is the eighth part of the Noble Eightfold Path, “right concentration.”

There are many myths about jhāna. I am not going to try to refute them all here. This is a user’s guide and not an academic treatise. But you will inevitably run into these issues, so I want to address some of the common

ones.

Is Jhāna Required to Attain Awakening?

For those that say that the jhānas are not necessary to Buddhist practice; they are doing the Noble Sevenfold Path, instead of the Noble Eightfold Middle Path. Right Concentration (jhāna) is an integral part of the Buddhist path.

- [Bhante Henepola Gunaratana]

Is jhāna really necessary? (hint: yes)

- [Justin Merritt]

It is clear from the Buddha's teachings that jhāna is required to attain an awakening. There is one passage in the Pāli Canon that is sometimes interpreted quite liberally as saying that jhāna is not required to attain an awakening. But the evidence is overwhelming that jhāna is a fundamental part of the path.

(Appendix C contains a more detailed look at the importance of jhāna in the Buddha's teaching.)

In the 20th century the political situation in Burma influenced how Buddhism evolved there, and eventually how it was imported into the West. There was a Burmese monk named Ledi Sayadaw who was afraid that British rule threatened Buddhism. So he developed "vipassana" or "insight meditation." He thought that this type of meditation, which does not require intense monastic training, would keep the tradition alive. Insight meditation emphasizes "dry insight," which is awakening without jhāna.

This was a noble intention. However, dry insight is not supported by the

Buddha's teachings.

If you would like to know more about this piece of Buddhist history, see the article "[The Insight Revolution](#)" in the November 2013 edition of *Buddhadharma Magazine*.

The Four Material Jhānas

As described in the chapter on the Four Noble Truths, each jhāna has jhāna factors:

"Here, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion.

"Again, with the stilling of applied and sustained thought, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the second jhāna, which has self-confidence and singleness of mind without applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of concentration.

"Again, with the fading away as well of rapture, a bhikkhu abides in equanimity, and mindful and fully aware, still feeling pleasure with the body, he enters upon and abides in the third jhāna, on account of which the noble ones announce: 'He has a pleasant abiding who has equanimity and is mindful.'

"Again, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the fourth jhāna, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity." - [MN 25.12-15]

In summary:

1. First jhāna: applied and sustained thought, rapture, and pleasure
2. Second jhāna: self-confidence, singleness of mind, rapture, and pleasure
3. Third jhāna: equanimity and pleasure
4. Fourth jhāna: equanimity

“Applied thought” means directing the thinking process to concentration, specifically the object of meditation. It is also called “directed thought.” Whatever thinking there is you direct to the subject of concentration.

In this case, directed thought means that you keep directing your thoughts to the breath. You don't direct them anywhere else. This is the factor that helps you stay concentrated on one thing.

- [Thānissaro Bhikkhu, *With Each & Every Breath*]

In the first translation the second factor is “sustained thought.” However, it is now more commonly rendered as “evaluation.” Directed thought directs your mind to concentration. Then you evaluate what you see and make adjustments as necessary to sustain your concentration.

Evaluation is the discernment factor, and it covers several activities. You evaluate how comfortable the breath is, and how well you're staying with the breath. You think up ways of improving either your breath or the way you're focused on the breath; then you try them out, evaluating the results of your experiments. If they don't turn out well, you try to think up new approaches. If they do turn out well, you try to figure out how to get the most out of them. This last aspect of evaluation includes the act of spreading good breath energy into different parts

of the body, spreading your awareness to fill the body as well, and then maintaining that sense of full-body breath and full-body awareness.

- [Thānissaro Bhikkhu, *With Each & Every Breath*]

These first two factors are ones that you cultivate and develop. The other two are the fruits of that cultivation. They will arise when the mind is concentrated.

The words “rapture” and “pleasure” are our old Pāli friends “pīti” and “sukkha.” There is a classic simile in *The Visuddhimagga* that explains the difference between them:

If a man exhausted in the desert saw or heard about a pond on the edge of a wood, he would have [pīti]; if he went into the wood’s shade and used the water, he would have [sukkha].

- [*Visuddhimagga*, IV.100]

Pīti is a whole body experience. People who do yoga find it easier to cultivate pīti than people who do not. It seems to flow naturally from their body awareness practices. Having said that I can do it, and I don’t do yoga. It was just harder for me.

(Many people ask about the relationship between yoga and Buddhist meditation. I can only pass along some anecdotal comments. I was at a retreat once where someone asked why the Buddha never talked about yoga. One of the retreatants said that yoga as we know it did not come about until about the mid-first millennium C.E., about 1,000 years after the Buddha’s death. Yoga is a Hindu practice, thus it has theistic qualities that are missing in Buddhism. However, there are monks and nuns who do yoga, and if you can excise out the theistic overtones, yoga is a useful adjunct to Buddhist meditation.)

As already discussed, pīti can be a highly charged state. It can be so highly charged that it can be uncomfortable. At other times it will be milder. I call this the jhāna buzz. It feels more like bliss than joy or rapture.

The dominant quality of the first jhāna is pīti. “Sukkha” arises along with it but that may be hard to see. The word “sukkha” means “pleasure.” (It is the opposite of “dukkha.”) It also means “happiness.” I think that both are good renderings of the experience.

As the passage says, “with the stilling of applied and sustained thought, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the second jhāna.” Thus, the thinking fades away. You lock into the state of concentration and no longer need the directed thought and evaluation.

The new factors of the second jhāna are 1) “self confidence,” also translated as “composure,” and 2) “singleness of mind,” also translated as “unification of awareness” and “unification of mind.” Ṭhānissaro gives a slightly different rendering of second jhāna factors:

The second jhāna has three factors: singleness of preoccupation, rapture, and pleasure. As the breath and awareness become one, they begin to feel saturated. No matter how much you try to make them feel even more full, they can't fill any further. At this point, directed thought and evaluation have no further work to do. You can let them go.

- [Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, *With Each & Every Breath*]

The sukkha is more dominant in the second jhāna than the pīti. The second jhāna is calmer and more tranquil than first jhāna. You may find yourself thinking that you are, simply put, happy.

In the third jhāna the pīti fades away leaving only the “happiness” or “pleasure.” It is a feeling of deep contentment. And we now have one

new factor and that is “equanimity.” The third jhāna is very calm, very tranquil, and very pleasant.

Finally, in the fourth jhāna the pleasure disappears leaving only the equanimity.

Attaining the four jhānas is the “standard way” to attain awakening. However, the Buddha also says that just the first jhāna is enough:

“When it was said: ‘Bhikkhus, I say that the destruction of the taints occurs in dependence on the first jhāna,’ for what reason was this said? Here, secluded from sensual pleasures... a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the first jhāna... He considers whatever phenomena exist there pertaining to form, feeling, perception, volitional activities, and consciousness as impermanent, suffering, an illness, a boil, a dart, misery, affliction, alien, disintegrating, empty, and non-self. He turns his mind away from those phenomena and directs it to the deathless element thus: ‘This is peaceful, this is sublime, that is, the stilling of all activities, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, nibbāna.’ If he is firm in this, he attains the destruction of the taints.” - [AN 9.36]

However, I caution you against looking for shortcuts. I think the Buddha here is simply stating a fact. It would be unusual for someone to attain an awakening with only the first jhāna. Nonetheless, the possibility exists.

What Are the Immaterial States?

“...with the complete surmounting of perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of sensory impact, with non-attention to perceptions of diversity, aware that ‘space is infinite,’ a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in

the base of infinite space. This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Māra...

“Again, by completely surmounting the base of infinite space, aware that ‘consciousness is infinite,’ a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the base of infinite consciousness. This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Māra...

“Again, by completely surmounting the base of infinite consciousness, aware that ‘there is nothing,” a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the base of nothingness. This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Māra...

“Again, by completely surmounting the base of nothingness, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Māra, to have become invisible to the Evil One by depriving Māra’s eye of its opportunity. Again, by completely surmounting the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the cessation of perception and feeling.” - [MN 25.16-20]

Here we have the five-fold description of the immaterial states. As noted, sometimes the fifth one (cessation) is left out. The most common formulation for the immaterial states only lists the first four.

They are:

1. The infinity of space
2. The infinity of consciousness
3. The base of nothingness
4. The base of neither perception-nor-non-perception

The first three states are closely related. The differences between them are subtle. In order to move between the first three immaterial states, you just make a slight change in the focus of attention. Going from the base of nothingness to the base of neither perception-nor-non-perception is more difficult.

I am not going to say more about the immaterial states at this point. (They are covered in the next chapter.) How important they are in any one person's practice varies. Traditionally, as noted, the standard formula is to master the first four jhānas as the entry point to awakening. We have also seen that just the first jhāna may be sufficient for awakening. Historically some arahants practiced the immaterial states after attaining an awakening. Other arahants never practiced them. And for others the immaterial attainments are quite useful in attaining an awakening. I have a friend who does these regularly, and she is quite comfortable with them.

One of the values of the immaterial states is that because they are immaterial, you lose the sense of a physical body. Thus, they help you detach from self-identifying with the body. There is also a loss of egocentricity, of the self being at the center of things. As Larry Rosenberg likes to say, most of the time our lives are like a movie. The movie is about me, it stars me, it's directed by me, produced by me... and that is a problem. The immaterial states put a good sized dent in that kind of thinking.

Jhāna in the Pāli Canon and The Visuddhimagga

As we saw in the discussion on concentration in the Four Noble Truths jhāna was the standard practice among the Buddha's monks and nuns:

When they depict the Buddha telling his disciples to go meditate, they never quote him as saying "go do vipassana," but always "go do jhāna."

- [Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, "[One Tool Among Many](#)"]

However, the description in *The Visuddhimagga* says that attaining jhāna is almost impossibly difficult:

The arousing of the sign is difficult for one who has done the preliminary work and only one in a hundred or a thousand can do it. To extend the sign when it has arisen and to reach absorption is difficult and only one in a hundred or a thousand can do it. To tame one's mind in the fourteen ways after reaching absorption is difficult and only one in a hundred or a thousand can do it. Rapid response after attaining transformation is difficult and only one in a hundred or a thousand can do it.

- [*Visuddhimagga*, XII.8]

If you do the math given here, only 1 in $100 \times 100 \times 100 = 1,000,000$ can reach absorption. Thus it is highly unlikely that the Buddha's monks and nuns were doing the type of jhāna practice described in *The Visuddhimagga*.

One difference between *Visuddhimagga* style jhāna and that described in the Pāli Canon is the use of a "nimitta." The Pāli word "nimitta" literally means "sign." The Buddha used the word "nimitta" in different contexts, typically to mean something like a signpost or a milestone, an indication that you have arrived somewhere. For example, the arising of pīti is a sign that you have achieved a certain level of concentration.

However, in *The Visuddhimagga*, a "nimitta" means - and this is a rather crude definition - a "mind-made" object. This is most commonly a bright, white light in the mind:

You should determine to keep your mind calmly concentrated on the white uggaha-nimitta for one, two, three hours, or more. If you can keep your mind fixed on the uggaha-nimitta for one or two hours, it should

become clear, bright, and brilliant. This is then the pa ibhaga-nimitta (counterpart sign). Determine and practise to keep your mind on the pa ibhaga-nimitta for one, two, or three hours. Practise until you succeed.

At this stage you will reach either access (upacara) or absorption (appana) concentration. It is called access concentration because it is close to and precedes jhāna. Absorption concentration is jhāna.

- [Pa Auk Tawya Sayadaw, *Knowing and Seeing*]

Remaining concentrated on a mind-made white light for three hours is quite a tall order (!). And as seen from the numbers given in *The Visuddhimagga* it is unlikely that most people will ever be able to do this.

To be sure, it is quite common to see a diffuse white light doing concentration practice. The Buddha may have used the word “nimitta” in this way, i.e, to indicate that you have attained a certain level of concentration. But there are other possible signs as well. (There may be visions, etc. They are to be ignored.)

The Visuddhimagga style nimitta is a sharply defined circle, like looking at the moon. This requires a very high degree of focused concentration.

(There is a good description of the history of the nimitta in jhāna by Bhikkhu Sona called [“The Mystery of the Breath Nimitta.”](#))

Another difference in the Visuddhimagga concentration is that you focus on a narrow area like the nose and exclude anything else. This goes against the instructions of the Buddha. As we have seen, the Buddha told us to expand our area of attention to include the whole body. It is a type of concentration that is broadly based.

Thānissaro Bhikkhu says that the narrow type of concentration is, in fact, very dangerous. It can cause you to lose the distinction between “inside”

and “outside.” One practitioner of Visuddhimagga jhāna thought he had said something to someone when it was just part of his inner dialog. Another one became so narrowly focused that he could not do his simple work job, which was chopping vegetables, on a retreat. So not only is this type of concentration not what the Buddha taught, it can cause serious problems.

This type of concentration also contradicts the Buddha’s teaching that concentration and insight arise together. It is hard to see how this can happen with laser-like focus. There is no room for anything but the concentration, no way for insights to arise.

Don’t worry about falling into this type of concentration accidentally. You have to try extremely hard to attain Visuddhimagga jhāna. This usually takes months and months of intensive effort. The style of practice that we are doing, which emphasizes a broad-based awareness, does not lead to these problems. The type of concentration that we are practicing is closer to how Larry Rosenberg describes it, “steadying the mind.”

It is not easy to attain jhāna, but it is possible. It is very pleasant, it is an antidote to the dangers of sense pleasures, and it is a very important step on the path to awakening.

One reason that a proper definition of jhāna is important is that there are many teachers who criticize the practice. I think that they are referring to the Visuddhimagga style of jhāna. They may have seen some of the problems that I mentioned. But it is difficult to see how there is anything wrong with the canonical type of jhāna, at least if you claim to teach what the Buddha taught.

Mistaking Jhāna for Awakening

Finally, there is the problem of mistaking jhāna for enlightenment.

If you have not been instructed in the practice of jhāna, I believe that this is possible. My first practice was Zen, and in Zen there is this experience

of “kensho,” or “satori.” It indicates a breakthrough in your practice. It is supposed to mean that you have awakened. But when I learned about jhāna it sounded like what I had been told about “kensho.”

Likewise, in non-Buddhist, theistic traditions the immaterial jhānas are interpreted as one-ness with God.

There are Buddhist teachers who have, sadly, been involved in scandals, especially sexual improprieties. Some of these teachers claim to have awakened. But this is not possible. The Canon makes it quite clear that someone who has attained an awakening is incapable of violating the precepts.

Jhāna is a conditioned state. When you come out of jhāna you are back in the world of the mundane. Jhāna has wonderful benefits. But it is not an awakening and you are still subject to the three poisons, the hindrances, etc. This is why it is very important to understand jhāna, so you know what it is, how to work with it, and how to not be misled by the experience.

I am not saying that everyone who claims to have experienced kensho is experiencing jhāna. I would have no way of knowing that. But if this is the claim, and that person goes on to break the precepts, they have not attained an awakening. When you attain an awakening there is a fundamental change in the mind. You see that what the Buddha says is true. Once you see it you do not have any desire to turn back. Why would you? The world of sense desires looks like a minefield, full of dangers. There is no appeal in it.

Attaining Jhāna

“Here, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion.” - [MN 25.13]

The first time that I attained jhāna I didn't know what it was. I think this is very common, especially on retreat. Unfortunately since I did not know what it was, I did not know what to do with it. It was overwhelming and exhausting. It was equally unfortunate that the teachers could only tell me "not to get stuck there." But I was stuck there, and I wanted to get out and did not know how.

Hopefully by having a full description of this state this will not happen to you.

I have practiced jhāna in two ways. I am going to describe them both. Method A is how I first attained jhāna. It is a more structured way of attaining jhāna. Having said that, I hardly ever practice this way any more. I now use Method B.

Method A

First of all, you need to be comfortable. If you have knee pain it is not possible to attain jhāna. You need a good, stable, and comfortable posture.

Now you bring yourself into the present moment. Go through the process discussed in *The Little Book of Buddhist Meditation*:

1. Generate gratitude.
2. Remember that you practice for the welfare and benefit of yourself and all beings.
3. Generate mettā for yourself.
4. Reflect on the five subjects for frequent recollection:
 1. That you are subject to aging.
 2. That you are subject to sickness.
 3. That you are subject to death and that this can happen at any time.
 4. That you will eventually become separated from everything and everyone that you know.
 5. That all you will take with you is the consequences of your

actions.

5. Turn your attention to the breath. Follow the breath all the way in and all the way out.

If the mind wanders off of the breath, bring it back. If you are having a difficult time staying on the breath, use one of these techniques (also discussed in *The Little Book of Buddhist Meditation*):

1. Note each in-breath with the word “in,” and each out-breath with the word “out.”
2. If that does not work, try counting the breaths.
3. If that does not work, do body sweeping, calming and relaxing each part of the body as you encounter it.

The beautiful breath is also a wonderful way to get quiet. Consciously breathe in until the whole body fills with breath energy. The simply let the air out. It's like going down a sliding board. As the air goes out let the mind fall into silence.

Eventually the mind will get quieter. You will be able to stay with the breath. How long that will take I cannot tell you.

Ayya Khema had a student who did not attain jhāna for 19 years. This is not usual but it can happen. However, it is to her credit that she did not make it into a problem. The rest of her practice developed wonderfully, so by the time she did attain jhāna she just slide into it like a comfortable set of clothes. This is the way to practice.

The breath will finally be in the forefront of your awareness. Anything else that happens will be in the background like the scenery on a stage. Your thoughts will be quiet and wispy.

As you get more concentrated you will begin to feel pleasant sensations in the body. This is the pīti. It may be mild and it may also be elusive. It may move around. Keep your attention on the breath until you feel the pīti consistently somewhere in the body.

Leigh Brasington says that the pleasant sensations may appear anywhere. The most common places are in the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet. Wherever it is, once you have a steady spot where there is a pleasant sensation, put your attention on the “pleasantness” of the pleasant sensation.

This is the tricky part. You are concentrating on the pleasantness, not the body part.

Once you do this let go of anything else, especially the desire to attain jhāna. Your concentration must be wholly on the pleasantness of the pleasant sensation. If you push yourself now to “attain jhāna” you won’t. The next step is to do nothing. Just keep your attention on the pleasantness of the pleasant sensation, and do nothing.

If your concentration wavers go back to the breath. If it wavers even more go back to one of the breath following techniques.

If you stay with the pleasantness it will spread. You cannot make this happen. It happens as a result of your concentrating on the pleasantness. Eventually it will spread to the whole body. And at some point you will “cross over.” You are there.

The first time that you enter jhāna it may be extremely fleeting, perhaps just a moment or two. It is very common to get excited at this point, and that will take you out of jhāna. Just go back to the breath, and repeat as necessary.

Leigh Brasington describes it in this way:

Pleasant sensations can occur pretty much anywhere. The most common place people that find pleasant sensations when they get to access concentration is in the hands. What you want to do with your hands when you meditate is put them in a nice position in which you can just leave them. The traditional posture is one hand

holding the other, with the thumbs lightly touching. This is a quite excellent posture because it has the tendency of moving the shoulders back and lining up your spine nicely. When the hands are held like this, many people find that eventually there is a nice, tingly, pleasant sensation that appears in the hands. You can also put your hands in all sorts of other positions - just place them however appeals to you. When you get to access concentration, if you notice that there's a nice pleasant feeling in the hands, drop the attention on the breath and focus entirely on the pleasantness of that sensation.

Another common place that people find a pleasant sensation is in the heart center, particularly if you're using mettā as the access method. Just shift your attention to the pleasantness of that sensation. Other places people find pleasant sensations include the third eye, the top of the head, the shoulders - actually, you name a body part, and I've had some student find a pleasant sensation there that they were able to focus upon long enough for the first jhāna to arise. It does not matter where the pleasant sensation manifests; what matters is that there is a pleasant sensation and you're able to put your attention on it and - now here comes the really hard part - do nothing else.

You find the pleasant sensation, and shift your attention to the pleasant sensation. You observe the pleasantness of the pleasant sensation, and do nothing else. If you can do that, the pleasant sensation will begin to grow in intensity, it will become stronger. This will not happen in a linear way. It'll sort of grow a little bit, and then grow a little bit more and then hang out, and grow a little bit

more...and then eventually, it will suddenly take off and take you into what is obviously an altered state of consciousness.

In this altered state of consciousness, you will be overcome with Rapture... Euphoria... Ecstasy... Delight. These are all English words that are used to translate the Pāli word pīti. Pīti is this physical sensation that literally takes you over and takes you into an altered state. It will be accompanied by an emotional sensation of joy and happiness. The Pāli word is sukha, the opposite of dukkha [pain, suffering]. And, if you remain one-pointed on this experience of pīti and sukha, that is the first jhāna.

- [Leigh Brasington, "[Instructions for Entering Jhana](#)"]

Method B

At this point you have a pretty good idea of the jhāna terrain. You know about the four (material) jhānas, what the jhāna factors are, and you know a structured method for entering the first jhāna.

The problem with this is that it can make the practice sound like a cookbook and it's not. I know more than one prominent teacher who says that you can only enter the jhānas in sequence. In other words, if you want to do the third jhāna you have to go in sequence, 1-2-3. I know that is not the case. I did the second and third jhānas before I could do the first jhāna. I had a lot of trouble getting into the first jhāna. The first jhāna, as noted, is an experience very much in the body, and at the time I was too much in my own head. I was not connected enough to my body to enter the first jhāna easily.

The Pāli Canon says that the Buddha first learned to enter the immaterial attainments "the base of nothingness" and the "base of neither perception

nor non-perception,” and as a child had entered the first jhāna. Thus, according to his own account the Buddha attained the first jhāna and the seventh and eighth jhānas before attaining any of the others. The scholars who say that the jhānas must be done in sequence claim that the canonical account is wrong. But the fact is that this is how the story goes.

Even today in Burma - where admittedly they do Visuddhimagga style jhāna - part of the mastery of doing jhāna is to jump from any one jhāna to any other. It is part of the final jhāna exam.

So that is one area where the cookbook doesn't quite hold together.

Not every state of concentration fits neatly into the formula that the Buddha gives. Even *The Visuddhimagga* lists five material jhānas, not four. And if we look outside of Buddhism, other religious traditions give different formulas. These states and practices are not unique to Buddhism. In the book *Jewish Meditation*, Aryeh Kaplan describes what to a Buddhist would be one material state and one immaterial state. These practices are also known in Christian mysticism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and I am sure many others. And they do not all follow the same formula.

The problem is that it can all become quite mechanical. You see everything in terms of the cookbook, and as a result you are not developing your own discernment. If you are in a state that does not fit the formula, you force it into that mold.

So it is very useful to do a formless concentration practice and see where that takes you. You already know the lay of the land. You know about pīti and sukkha. You know about going from the higher energy of pīti to the lower energy of sukkha, from a state of joy and rapture to happiness and then contentment. Then equanimity will arise, and finally you let go of the pleasantness and all that is left is the equanimity. And soon we will be looking more deeply into the immaterial states. This gives you a map of the territory.

Method B is the unstructured way of practice. It instructs you to simply get as concentrated as you can and see where that takes you. You should

know the drill by now. Start by focusing at the nose. As your concentration gets stronger your attention will naturally expand to include the whole body. Get the mind as quiet as possible. No matter what stay with the breath. If and when jhāna factors arise simply note them with your background awareness. But always stay with the breath.

Chances are that you will find yourself going in and out of jhāna. It could be any of them. Use your discernment to figure out where you are and that may not fit into the canonical definitions. Learn to play with them. Change your place of focus. Change your breathing. See what it has to offer.

Ṭhānissaro tells this story:

...[Ajān Fuang] tried to instill in his students these qualities of self-reliance, ingenuity, and a willingness to take risks and test things for themselves. He did that not only by talking about these qualities, but also by forcing you into situations where you'd have to develop them. Had he always been there to confirm for you that, "Yes, you've reached the third jhāna", or, "No, that's only the second jhāna", he would have short-circuited the qualities he was trying to instill. He, rather than your own powers of observation, would have been the authority on what was going on in your mind; and you would have been absolved of any responsibility for correctly evaluating what you had experienced...

As he once told me, "If I have to explain everything, you'll get used to having things handed to you on a platter. And then what will you do when problems come up in your meditation and you don't have any experience in figuring things out on your own?"

- [Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, "[Jhana Not by the Numbers](#)"]

As you get better at this practice, that sense of well-being gets stronger. Sitting is more pleasant. Your mind is sharper. Insights arise.

Now is also a good time to talk about the quality of attention. As I have said, the concentration that we are developing is broadly based. This is not an electron microscope. It is more like the zoom lens on a camera.

You have a focused kind of attention. That is what you are using to stay with the breath. You also have a background attention. That is what helps you see what is going on. It is especially important in the factor of evaluation.

This background awareness is especially helpful off of the cushion. We use it to observe the mind during the day. It helps to keep those Nazis in our mind from having complete control. We use the mind to watch the mind.

The Hindrances

An interesting exercise when you go into the first jhāna is to look for the hindrances. They won't be there. You can look for desire, ill-will, restlessness, sloth, and doubt, and you won't see them.

There are times in your practice where one or more of the hindrances arise. If they are strong you may need to work with them in a pro-active way to abandon them. Sometimes simply turning your attention to them is enough to make them disappear. Simple awareness is enough. At other times you must apply an antidote, like the Buddha's suggestion of splashing water on the face if you feel sleepy.

But as you get more concentrated they simply fall away, and that is another way to handle them. The concentration itself makes them disappear. This shows that your skill as a meditator is increasing. And this is a taste of one of the fruits of complete awakening.

Getting Out of Jhāna

Usually the problem with jhāna is getting into it and then staying there. However, there are cases where the jhāna takes on a life of its own and you cannot get out of it. If this happens to you, take a very deep breath and then exhale as far out as you can. You may need to blow the air out through your mouth, and you may need to do this several times. Bring the energy level down as much as possible.

Getting uncomfortably stuck is usually only a problem in the first jhāna. I am not aware of any case where it has happened in other jhānas. However if this does happen, the same technique should work.

Continuing to Practice Jhāna

In the next sections we will look at how to get into the other jhānas, but before we do that I want to caution against turning this into a collection of attainments. Once you enter jhāna that is a very important step. And as we have seen, according to the Buddha attaining even the first jhāna can be enough for an awakening.

So do not be in too much of a hurry to go on to other jhānas. You must do a lot - and I mean "a lot" - of work with jhāna. Just trying to learn how to go through them would be like flying from Paris to Berlin to Rome and then saying that you had seen France, Germany, and Italy. There is a lot of territory in each jhāna, and I know people who are extremely adept at moving between them but never go on to attain an awakening. There are, to be sure, a number of reasons that I think this happens, but one of them is that they are too impatient to spend the time that it takes to fully explore France, as it were.

There is no extra credit for being able to move up and down through the jhānas. You are better off doing one jhāna really well than you are learning how to move up and down through them all. There are no fixed rules in this game, but patience - remember patience? - is one of our most important allies. It's twin sibling - persistence - is the other. They are the Romulus and Remus of meditation.

We live in this world of attainment and accomplishment, and that is very disruptive to a meditation practice. I have spent a lot of my life cultivating patience and persistence because a) they are not a natural part of my temperament, and b) they are really important in engineering, my chosen career. And after a fashion I began to think of myself as a pretty patient person.

Then I went to India, and I got a completely different idea of what patience and persistence mean. We visited a place called "[Mehta's Silk](#)" where they do silk weaving the same way they did it 2,000 years ago. I got to see an 80+ year old master silk weaver at work.

Mehta's Silk has "modern" weaving machines, but this being India, the master weavers refuse to use them. They sit on a very uncomfortable concrete floor. The loom is in a pit that is below the floor level. The weaver sits there with only a picture of the finished product. He stares at it for a while, and eventually he picks up one of the silk bobbins and runs the thread through the tapestry, after which he carefully tamps down the thread to get the proper tension. He stares at it for a while until he is satisfied that it is perfect, and then he goes back to the picture and stares some more. Wash, rinse, repeat. This is what they do all day, every day.

I bought a couple of those silk weavings. Each one of them is about 18 inches wide and 3 feet long. It takes three months to make each one.

That is patience. I found it deeply humbling. It gave me a completely different perspective on what that word means. So if you spend countless hours/months/years doing first jhāna, and that feels like the right place for you, and your practice is progressing in a balanced way, then that is a good way to practice. Remember Ayya Khema's student who spent 19 years before attaining jhāna, but who had an excellent practice?

There are a lot of moving parts to the Buddha's Path. Jhāna is one of them. It is a very important one, to be sure, but it is just one. And the first jhāna is also just one. You may have an affinity for one of the jhānas. And - as happened with me and first jhāna - you may find one that proves

challenging. It is all a part of the practice.

So practice like the weaver. Get each thread just so. Whatever thread you are using at the moment, make that the only one you care about at the moment. Eventually you will have the whole tapestry, and it happens one patiently and perfectly placed thread at a time.



Figure: Master weaver at Mehta's Silk, Varanasi, India

Hundreds of flowers in the spring, the moon in the autumn,

A cool breeze in summer; and snow in winter;

If there is no vain cloud in your mind

For you it is a good season.

- [Zen Comments on the Mumonkan 140]

Entering the Second Jhāna

“Again, with the stilling of applied and sustained thought, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the second jhāna,

which has self-confidence and singleness of mind without applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of concentration.” - [MN 25.14]

“Just like a lake with spring-water welling up from within, having no inflow from east, west, north, or south, and with the skies periodically supplying abundant showers, so that the cool fount of water welling up from within the lake would permeate and pervade, suffuse and fill it with cool waters, there being no part of the lake unpervaded by the cool waters; even so, the [bhikkhu] permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture and pleasure born of composure. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture and pleasure born of composure...” - [AN 5.28]

As with so many passages in the Canon there is a wonderful poetry to the second quote here, the one from the Aṅguttara Nikāya. Ponds like this do exist. They call them “kettle ponds” or “kettle lakes” in New England. Curiously, the most famous pond in New England is a kettle pond. That is Walden Pond, once home to Henry David Thoreau, the great American mystic. You can circumambulate Walden Pond without ever crossing a stream. As the Buddha described here, Walden Pond is fed completely by underground streams.

In the first jhāna there is conscious activity due to the directed thought and evaluation. In the second jhāna there is still the effort of keeping the mind concentrated, but now the mind is locked in. The directed thought and evaluation fall away. Further, the highly charged pīti energy of the first jhāna becomes less pronounced than the sukka, the pleasantness/pleasure/happiness. You simply feel happy. You may find yourself smiling. It feels pleasant and effortless.

You may also find that the energy of the first jhāna is rooted in the whole

body. In the second jhāna the distinction between body and mind falls away. There is no body experiencing joy/rapture/bliss. There is simply the happiness. The background and foreground attention are one. This is the unification of mind.

I know of three ways to get from first jhāna to second jhāna.

The first is to simply let it happen. You get into first jhāna, and you continue to stay with the breath as long as you can and as steadily as you can. Eventually the need for conscious activity to stay in jhāna falls away. I think that the texts imply that this is how the Buddha wants us to practice.

This may take quite a while to happen. If that becomes a problem, re-read the last section Continuing to Practice Jhāna. Patience, persistence. Romulus, Remus. And this way of getting into second jhāna is consistent with Method B.

If you are achievement oriented, this will be a good way for you to practice. And it may be even if you are not. It helps to take some of the “me” out of the practice. It becomes more about the doing and less about the doer. You are not just practicing jhāna you are practicing patience, contentment, and other qualities that are important on the path.

However, if the energy of the first jhāna is a problem you may want a more pro-active way of getting into second jhāna. The second way that you can get into second jhāna is to find a place in the body where there is stillness. Put your attention there. Use this as your focal point for following the breath in and out. Use at least some of your attention to focus on the stillness. This should take the energy level down to a calmer, more tranquil place.

The breathing and the attention in the second jhāna stay together naturally. Yes, there is some energy and some effort involved in keeping them there, but they all work together. Nothing is forced. They are all in perfect harmony. Larry Rosenberg says that he had a student once who described it as a feeling of “being breathed”:

It's as if, in the first jhāna, you were identifying with one part of your breath and one part of your awareness as you worked another part of the breath through another part of your awareness. Now those dividing lines are erased. Awareness becomes one, the breath becomes one, and both become one with each other.

- [Thānissaro Bhikkhu, *With Each & Every Breath*]

A third way of entering the second jhāna is to put your attention on the heart center. It is like pushing a button in an elevator. That button is in the center of the chest. You go from the whole body experience of the first jhāna to the center of the chest, the heart center.

You may recall that the heart chakra is where you put your attention for mettā practice. There is a strong connection between the second jhāna and mettā. When you get a strong second jhāna, turn your attention to mettā. See if you can feel any anger, aversion, or hatred for your worst enemy. You will not be able to. Think of the person in the world that you most dislike. Think of a politician. You will not be able to hate them. It is the unconditioned love of a parent for a child.

One of the things that happens in this practice is that in the beginning, certain aspects of the practice are done in a somewhat contrived way. The mettā phrases are like that. You just do the best you can with your mind wherever it is.

But eventually you will experience things in a transcendent way. Non-self is like that. Mettā is like that. Equanimity is like that. And when you experience mettā when in jhāna, it will be deep and profound. These states are still conditioned, but they are a taste of final release.

In this gradual path, you get these tantalizing tastes of what the Buddha described. These are important milestones. They are a positive feedback loop. This is one reason that jhāna practice is so important. It is only in

jhāna that you experience for yourself these phenomena.

Since I mentioned non-self, let me suggest something else to try when you attain jhāna. I think this will only work starting with the second jhāna. I think there is still too much mental activity in the first jhāna. But in any event, the exercise is to let go of any sense of a self experiencing jhāna. First see that a part of your background attention is a subtle “me” experiencing jhāna. Then let go of that “me.” You will feel a lessening of stress. This will probably be the first time that you can see how this idea of a “self,” that all this is happening to “me,” causes stress and suffering.

Once you can enter the second jhāna, one of the skills of doing jhāna is to move back and forth between them. You can even move in and out of jhāna. You should try this. Go back to where you were before entering jhāna. Now enter the first jhāna. Then enter the second jhāna. Now move back to the first jhāna. Then back to the second jhāna. In second jhāna you can also move back and forth between it and mettā. Then you can move back to the first jhāna, and back to being out of jhāna. And so forth. This is fun, and it shows that your skill is growing. You are gaining mastery over your own mind. The tail is no longer wagging the dog.

Once you are in the second jhāna, take time and time and more time to explore the territory. Getting into the second jhāna just means you have landed in Berlin. Now explore the whole of it, all of Germany.

Even after you can attain any of the jhānas, you may not be able to get into them all the time. Some days it may take longer. Some days you may be able to slide right into them. And on other days you will not be able to get there. Do not worry about that. This is very common. Just keep doing the best you can. At least you will know that it is possible

You can do these practices for months and years and you will continue to find different qualities to them. You will continue to be able to sit longer and get into deeper and deeper states. There is always a new aspect to explore. This is important to maintain interest in the practice. Otherwise it becomes dry. If you have not yet attained jhāna it might be hard to

understand how you can get bored with bliss and happiness, but it does happen.

Wrong Concentration

This leads to the topic of “delusion concentration.” You can get into a state that feels like jhāna. It is quite pleasant, but it is like the mind is in a fog. In true jhāna the mind is sharp. Your awareness and attention are clear:

Delusion concentration... comes about when the breath gets so comfortable that your focus drifts from the breath to the sense of comfort itself, your mindfulness begins to blur, and your sense of the body and your surroundings gets lost in a pleasant haze. When you emerge, you find it hard to identify where exactly you were focused.

- [Thānissaro Bhikkhu, *With Each & Every Breath*]

Thānissaro also describes another type of wrong concentration that is, I believe, the same as Visuddhimagga jhāna:

The state of non-perception comes about from making your focus extremely one-pointed and so refined that it refuses to settle on or label even the most fleeting mental objects. You drop into a state in which you lose all sense of the body, of any internal or external sounds, or of any thoughts or perceptions at all. There's just enough tiny awareness to let you know, when you emerge, that you haven't been asleep. You can stay there for many hours, and yet time passes very quickly. Two hours can seem like two minutes. You can also program yourself to come out at a particular time.

This state does have its uses - as when you're in severe

pain and want some respite from it. As long as you recognize that it's not right concentration or release, the only danger is that you may decide that you like hiding out there so much that you don't want to do the work needed to go further in the practice.

- [Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, *With Each & Every Breath*]

The important quality here is “perception.” Without perception you cannot have insight, and you cannot develop the vipassana/wisdom/insight quality in tandem with concentration. The quality of perception is present in every level of jhāna except for the immaterial states of “neither perception nor non-perception” and “cessation.” Otherwise it is wrong concentration. In those last two states you must come out of them in order to evaluate what happened while you were in them.

Entering the Third Jhāna

“Again, with the fading away as well of rapture, a bhikkhu abides in equanimity, and mindful and fully aware, still feeling pleasure with the body, he enters upon and abides in the third jhāna, on account of which the noble ones announce: ‘He has a pleasant abiding who has equanimity and is mindful.’” - [MN 25.14]

“Again, with the fading away as well of rapture, a bhikkhu dwells equanimous and, mindful and clearly comprehending, he experiences pleasure with the body; he enters and dwells in the third jhāna of which the noble ones declare: ‘He is equanimous, mindful, one who dwells happily.’ He makes the happiness divested of rapture drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is

no part of his whole body that is not pervaded by the happiness divested of rapture. Just as, in a pond of blue or red or white lotuses, some lotuses that are born and grow in the water might thrive immersed in the water without rising out of it, and cool water would drench, steep, fill, and pervade them to their tips and their roots, so that there would be no part of those lotuses that would not be pervaded by cool water; so too, the bhikkhu makes the happiness divested of rapture drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body that is not pervaded by the happiness divested of rapture. This is the third development of noble five-factored right concentration.” - [AN 5.28]

(The reason that the concentration is “five-factored” is because it is the four jhānas plus insight. This once again emphasizes the development of concentration and insight “yoked together.”)

So there are two jhāna factors here, pleasure (sukkha) and equanimity. There is deep contentment. You may find yourself thinking “I feel contented.” It is pleasant and calm.

Here the energy level is even calmer. As with the second jhāna this will happen naturally if you practice (and practice and practice) the second jhāna. It is natural for the mind in second jhāna to become more calm and more still and this will lead you to the third jhāna.

One of the things that you can play with are the qualities of mind that come with these deeper states of concentration. Find the stillness and lock onto it. Do the same with serenity.

We start by working very hard to get the mind still. We deal with distractions, the three poisons, the hindrances, etc. Our attention is mainly on the difficult mind states that we are trying to abandon.

But now we can turn that process around and latch onto the positive mind states. The difficult ones are now weaker. We direct our attention to the stillness, the calm, and the serenity. We can just go there and any difficult mind states just hover in the background. They are not a problem anymore.

There is also a pro-active way to go into the third jhāna. In the second jhāna the attention is at the heart center. Now move it down to the abdomen, to just below the navel. In Zen they call this the “hara.” With these energy spots in the body you may have to look around a little to find the sweet spot. Feel for it. You should feel the energy. These are not physical locations in the body. They are energy centers.

Moving the attention down also moves the energy level down. There are many ways to work with the breath in the abdomen. You can feel the diaphragm moving up and down. You can feel the rising and falling of the abdomen. You can imagine a balloon filling and emptying as the air moves in and out of the lungs. Play with these and see what works best for you. Make up your own. The cushion is your laboratory. Don't be afraid to try things, to experiment, and don't be afraid to fail. No one has ever been harmed cultivating serenity:

Success represents the 1% of your work which results from the 99% that is called failure.

- [Soichiro Honda]

When you are in the third jhāna make sure that you can identify the jhāna factors: pleasantness and equanimity. The pleasantness has been with you all along, although in the first jhāna the pīti overwhelms it. The equanimity is new. If worldly unpleasant sensations arise they will simply pass you by like a car on the highway. This is also true for pleasant sensations. It is incredibly liberating. You can now “sit in the midst of your own experience.”

It takes a while to get these states to mature. And of course, the object is

not to sit down on the cushion and start pressing buttons and moving up and down through the jhānas, although this is certainly a useful practice. (It is also fun.) The objective is to develop all the qualities that the Buddha teaches. It always goes back to virtue. If you are not cultivating kindness, generosity, wisdom, patience, etc., etc., etc., there is no point to any of this.

The more you do these practices the more the qualities of virtue should manifest in your life. If you use your meditative attainments to feel superior to other people you are missing the point. You will have conceit up to the point of final awakening, just make sure that you use it skillfully. Use it to believe in your ability to awaken. Eventually it will go away, but in the meantime you need conceit and self-confidence to help you on the path. Other people have done this and so can you.

I recently heard a story about a self-described arahant who is “testy and unpleasant.” I don’t believe that he is an arahant. I know a few people who have attained at least the first stage of awakening. People gravitate toward them. They inspire. They are calm and centered. They are pleasant to be around. They have a sense of humor. They embody altruistic virtue.

In Buddhism, just as in every other aspect of life people like to make claims about themselves. But the proof, as the saying goes, of the pudding is in the tasting. As you get more skilled on the cushion make sure that this skill is manifesting equally off the cushion.

Every day, think as you wake up, today I am fortunate to be alive, I have a precious human life, I am not going to waste it. I am going to use all my energies to develop myself, to expand my heart out to others; to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. I am going to have kind thoughts towards others, I am not going to get angry or think badly about others. I am going to benefit others as much as I can.

- [Dalai Lama XIV]

Entering the Fourth Jhāna

“Again, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the fourth jhāna, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity.” - [MN 25.12-15]

“Again, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous passing away of joy and dejection, a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the fourth jhāna, neither painful nor pleasant, which has purification of mindfulness by equanimity. He sits pervading this body with a pure bright mind, so that there is no part of his whole body that is not pervaded by the pure bright mind. Just as a man might be sitting covered from the head down with a white cloth, so that there would be no part of his whole body that is not pervaded by the white cloth; so too, the bhikkhu sits pervading this body with a pure bright mind, so that there is no part of his whole body that is not pervaded by the pure bright mind. This is the fourth development of noble five-factored right concentration.” - [AN 5.28]

The fourth jhāna has only one factor: equanimity.

Equanimity shows up in many of the Buddha’s teachings. It is one of the brahma vihāras, the “noble abidings.” It is one of the factors of awakening.

As with the discussion of mettā and the second jhāna, equanimity can

manifest in three ways:

1. In a mundane or worldly sense. In this case we simply try to do the best we can with whatever skill level we have.
2. As a fruit of jhāna. This is still conditioned, but it gives us a pure sense of what it is like after awakening.
3. As a fruit of awakening. In this case the quality is no longer conditioned. It is simply a part of our being. We are not capable of acting in a way that is contrary to it.

Until you have attained either the third and preferably the fourth jhāna I do not believe it is possible to know true equanimity. Until then you will be practicing equanimity in the worldly or mundane sense.

In the case of the other jhānas, if you practice long enough you will eventually fall into the next one. I do not think this is true of the fourth jhāna. The third jhāna is very pleasant, so the stress in it is not strong enough for the mind to naturally let go of it. That is what the mind is doing, letting go of ever more subtle levels of stress. There is still stress in these states, and that is why the mind eventually tends to let go of that stress and fall into the next level of concentration.

Be that as it may, the instruction to go from the third jhāna to the fourth is quite simple: let go of the pleasantness. All that will be left is the equanimity.

The mind will be very still and very sharp. The breath will be subtle. You may feel like the breathing has stopped. Sometimes people panic when this happens.

There is some debate about this phenomenon. There are claims that when the body and mind get very still, the need for oxygen is so low that you can breathe through your skin. (There are animals that can do this.) But whatever is going on physically, there is no harm in this. You are not going to die. No one ever has. So if this happens to you, work with it so you do not have a sense of panic. This is simply the mind-body complex getting very, very still. It is a good thing.

One thing that may happen in the fourth jhāna is that you will like it. If this happens you will fall back into the third jhāna. That is not a problem. Simply let go of the pleasantness, and you will be back in the fourth jhāna.

Practice going back and forth between the different jhānas. You develop a great deal of control over your mind in this way. But also remember that it takes lots and lots and lots and lots of jhāna practice to see the whole terrain. And it takes lots and lots and lots and lots of jhāna practice to get to where we want to go, and that is an awakening.

We are replacing our sense desires with the more wholesome desire for stillness, serenity, concentration, and equanimity. This is an important step in our journey. This is the Buddha's dispassion. We are replacing our sense desires with something better, much better. It doesn't have the dangers inherent in sense desire. The sense desires are the leper's coal pit.

*Those with calm minds –
masterful,
mindful,
absorbed in jhāna –
clearly see Dhamma rightly,
not intent on sensual pleasures.
Delighting in heedfulness,
calm,
seeing danger in heedlessness, they
– incapable of falling away –
are right in the presence of Unbinding.
- [Iti 2.45]*

The Immaterial Attainments

“Again, with the complete surmounting of perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of sensory impact, with non-attention to perceptions of diversity, aware that ‘space is infinite,’ a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the base of infinite space. This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Māra...

“Again, by completely surmounting the base of infinite space, aware that ‘consciousness is infinite,’ a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the base of infinite consciousness. This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Māra...

“Again, by completely surmounting the base of infinite consciousness, aware that ‘there is nothing,’ a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the base of nothingness. This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Māra...

“Again, by completely surmounting the base of nothingness, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Māra, to have become invisible to the Evil One by depriving Māra’s eye of its opportunity.

“Again, by completely surmounting the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the cessation of perception and feeling. And his taints are destroyed by his seeing with wisdom. This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Māra, to have become invisible to the Evil One by depriving Māra’s eye of its

opportunity, and to have crossed beyond attachment to the world.” - [MN 25.16-20]

The four jhānas focus on the same topic - the breath - but the way they relate to the breath grows progressively more refined. Once the mind reaches the fourth jhāna, this can form the basis for the formless attainments. Here the relationship among the stages is reversed: All the formless attainments relate to their themes in the same way - with the equanimity and singleness of the fourth jhāna - but they focus on different themes.

- [Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, *With Each and Every Breath*]

As noted previously, in the Pāli Canon these states are not called “jhānas.” The closest thing that we have to a category name that the Buddha gave us is “the liberations that are peaceful and immaterial” [MN 6.10]. They are called variously “the immaterial states / realms / spheres / attainments,” and “the formless states / realms / spheres / attainments.” The Pāli word is “arupa.” The Pāli word “rupa” means “body” or “material,” the prefix “a” means “not,” so “arupa” means literally “not the body” or “not material.”

Some scholars have stated that the immaterial states are extensions of the fourth jhāna but I believe is incorrect. (My favorite teacher says this as well, so I may be on thin ice here...) The fourth jhāna is, after all, a material state, i.e., one in which you are aware of the body. In the “arupas” the sense of a body falls away. This is what makes them “immaterial.”

(Admittedly this is somewhat academic. If it helps you to think of the immaterial states as extensions of the fourth jhāna, do it.)

However you categorize them, they are states of ever-deeper

concentration. Thus it is credible to call them “jhānas.”

Attaining the Base of Infinite Space

“Again, with the complete surmounting of perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of sensory impact, with non-attention to perceptions of diversity, aware that ‘space is infinite,’ a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the base of infinite space. This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Māra...” - [MN 25.16]

“O, that this too too solid flesh would melt.”

- [William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 1 Scene 2]

First let me make a brief comment about the word “attain.” If you are familiar with the language of Zen, you know that in Zen they distance themselves from this word. There is some sense to that. As noted in the instructions for attaining the first jhāna, you must let go of any desire to enter it. You cannot force it to happen. This is true for much of the path. You apply mindfulness, awareness, and ardency to the object of contemplation, and the fruits of the practice arise on their own.

However, it is an attainment, and the Buddha used this word frequently. There are steps in this path. You develop skills. You see signs when the practice produces results. In the Four Noble Truths each truth has an activity associated with it. “Dukkha” is to be comprehended. “Clinging” is to be abandoned. “Cessation” is to be realized. The path is to be developed.

A word that may work better for some people is “enter,” i.e., you enter each jhāna. But in fact the word that the Buddha used is “attainment.”

Another linguistic note is that at the time of the Buddha they did not have the notion of infinity. Semantically the word is “limitless” or

“boundless.” However most modern scholars use the term “infinity” because we do have that notion and it is accurate.

To enter the base of infinite space, start in the fourth jhāna. This must be quite stable. If it is not, keep practicing the fourth jhāna until you can get it stable.

Next, get in touch with the boundaries of your body.

Now begin to expand these boundaries. Expand the boundaries to the limit of the room. Expand them to the boundaries of the building. Then the property, the neighborhood, the town, the state, the country, the planet, outwards into space, and finally to the “infinitude of space.” Just keep expanding and keep your attention on the sense of outward expansion.

There are two caveats. One is not to get wrapped up in any physical objects. This is what “the perception of diversity” means. This contemplation is about “space.” Every physical object in the universe is mostly space. If you had a good enough microscope and you looked at your body it would be almost entirely empty with only a few tiny particles here and there. This realm is the infinity of space, not any objects in it:

As the mind in the fourth jhāna stays with the stillness of the breath filling the body, it begins to sense that the only reason it feels a boundary or form to the body is because of the perception or mental image of the body’s form that it’s been holding to. There is no movement of the breath to confirm that perception. Instead, the body feels like a cloud of mist droplets, each droplet a sensation, but with no clear boundary to the cloud.

To reach the first formless attainment, allow the perception of the form of the body to drop away. Then focus, not on the droplets of sensation, but on the space

in-between them. This space then goes out beyond the body without limit and can penetrate everything else. However, you don't try to trace it out to its limit. You simply hold in mind the perception of "infinite space" or "unlimited space." If you can stay there solidly, you reach the first formless attainment, the dimension of the infinitude of space.

- [Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, *With Each and Every Breath*]

The second caveat is that you may find at certain points that you encounter resistance to the outward expansion. Just push through it. Keep focused on the sense of outward expansion.

In the immaterial realms you will not feel any sense of a body or a sense of self. The sense of a separate self disappears. This is anattā.

Attaining the Base of Infinite Consciousness

"Again, by completely surmounting the base of infinite space, aware that 'consciousness is infinite,' a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the base of infinite consciousness. This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Māra..." - [MN 25.17]

When you attain the base of infinite space, you will see a subtle sense of an observer. There is the infinite space, and there is the awareness of the infinite space. In order to attain the base of infinite consciousness you turn your attention to the awareness itself:

After you've become adept at staying with the perception of infinite space, you can pose the question, "What knows infinite space?" Your attention shifts to the awareness of the space, and you realize that the awareness, like the space, has no limits, although again you don't try to trace

it out to its limits. You just stay centered where you are. (If you try asking this question before you're adept at staying with the perception of infinite space, the mind will just revert to a lower level of concentration, or may leave concentration entirely. So go back to the perception of space.) If you can stay with that perception of infinite or unlimited awareness - or simply, "knowing, knowing, knowing" - you enter the second formless attainment, the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness.

- [Thānissaro Bhikkhu, *With Each and Every Breath*]

In this case, the observed and the observer become one:

It's at this stage that your inner observer gets thrown into sharp relief. When you dropped the breath for the perception of "space," you gained a clear sense that your breath and your awareness of the breath were two separate things, and you could see precisely where and how they were separate. When you dropped the perception of "space," you could see that the awareness was separate even from space. As you carry your perception of "aware" into daily life, you can apply the same principle to everything that comes your way: Objects and events are one thing; the knowing awareness is something else.

- [Thānissaro Bhikkhu, *With Each and Every Breath*]

Leigh Brasington notes that people who have a theistic orientation often mistake this state for become one with "atman" in Hindu terms, a "higher power" in general terms, or "God" in mono-theistic terms. That is because there is a sense of "oneness." When the distinction between the observed and the observer drops away, that may be how it feels if that is

how you are predisposed. But this is not the end of the path. There is still more to go. This is simply an awareness that if space is infinite, then that which is aware of the infinite space must also be infinite.

The understanding that the immaterial attainments are not the final goal was one of the Buddha's great insights. His teachers were telling him that this was it, this was the final goal, final release. But he examined these states and decided that they are not the end, so he kept searching.

Attaining the Base of Nothingness

“Again, by completely surmounting the base of infinite consciousness, aware that ‘there is nothing,’ a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the base of nothingness. This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Māra...” - [MN 25.18]

And now we turn the attention to what consciousness is conscious of, which is nothing.

Treat this with some care. As noted in the section on Right Mindfulness, the Buddha did not teach nihilism. The base of nothingness is not suggesting that ultimately nothing exists. Rather, more subtly, no “things” exist. That is why this is sometimes called the base of no-“thingness.”

If this sounds a little enigmatic, think about how – with the exception of nirvāṇa - the Buddha described everything in the universe as being caused. A “thing” exists because the causes and conditions that make it exist are present. When those causes and conditions are no longer present, then the “thing” no longer exists. If you set fire to a piece of paper, the paper ceases to exist. Thus there are no “things” that have a permanent essence.

And now, as you drop the sense of oneness, what is left is nothing:

There's still awareness, but you're not labeling it as

awareness. You're just with the sense of lightness that comes from replacing the label of "knowing" with something that feels less burdensome. The label of "knowing" requires that you make an effort to keep knowing. But the label of "nothing" allows you to put that burden down. If you can stay with that perception of, "There's nothing" or "Nothing's happening," you enter the third formless attainment, the dimension of nothingness.

- [Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, *With Each and Every Breath*]

Another way to look at the formless attainments - indeed, all of the jhānas - is that in each state the question we are asking is, "Where is there still stress, where is there still a disturbance?" It is a radical form of stress reduction in increasingly subtle forms. In the case of the base of infinite consciousness the stress is in the oneness, so you let go of it.

Attaining the Base of Neither Perception Nor Non-perception

"Again, by completely surmounting the base of nothingness, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Māra, to have become invisible to the Evil One by depriving Māra's eye of its opportunity." - [MN 25.19]

In the first seven jhānas we use perception to see what is going on. Now you drop the perception itself:

After you've become adept at staying with the perception of "There's nothing" or "Nothing's happening," you can ask yourself if there's still any disturbance in that sense

of nothingness. When you see that the disturbance is caused by the perception itself, you drop the perception. If you do this when your focus is not subtle enough, you'll revert to a lower stage of concentration. But if you can stay in the mental space left empty by the perception when it falls away, that's what you do. You can't say that there's another perception there, but because you have a non-verbal sense that you know where you are, you can't say that there's no perception, either. If you can continue staying there, you enter the fourth formless attainment, the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.

- [Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, *With Each and Every Breath*]

The eighth jhāna is unique in that you cannot discern what is happening when you are in that state. You have to come out of the eighth jhāna to analyze it and to have insights. In the other jhānas, because perception is there, insights will arise when you are in them.

Perception is our ability to identify or name things. The mind takes raw input like colors and shapes and sounds and texture, and interprets that input as table, car passing by, etc. In the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, however, that quality ceases. This makes it difficult to describe. You are in a state in which there are no characteristics by which you can describe it. This is why it is a state of “non-perception.” But it is also a state that can be described as being not describable, which is the quality of “perception.” Thus the state exists in the nether world between perception and non-perception.

In each state we look for the stress or the disturbance and we look to abandon that stress. It is also a process of simplification. While they are “attainments” they can also be called “abandonments.” We start with the first jhāna, which is full of activity, and step-by-step we abandon mental phenomena, the stress gets less, and we get to a point of extreme simplification in mental activity.

4. Mindfulness & Concentration

There is one final sutta that I would like to discuss because in some ways it combines many of the teachings that we have just looked at. While this sutta is called “Mindfulness of the Body,” it could be called “Mindfulness & Concentration.” This is the “Kāyagatāsati Sutta: Mindfulness of the Body” [MN 119].

For some reason this sutta does not get quite as much play as the Ānāpānasati Sutta and the Satipatṭhāna Sutta. I think that one reason for this is that the Kāyagatāsati Sutta puts some emphasis on parts of the Buddha’s teachings with which many meditation teachers are uncomfortable. These include jhāna, psychic powers, and rebirth. This is no longer Buddhism 101. This is the graduate level course.

This sutta begins when there is a lengthy discussion among the monks about the benefits of mindfulness of the body. We know it is lengthy because it begins after the morning meal, and it continues well into the afternoon. Apparently they are unable to come to any consensus about the benefits of mindfulness of the body. Fortunately, however, the Buddha shows up:

[bhikkhus] “Here, venerable sir, we were sitting in the assembly hall, where we had met together on returning from our almsround, after our meal, when this discussion arose among us: ‘It is wonderful, friends, it is marvelous, how it has been said by the Blessed One who knows and sees, accomplished and fully enlightened, that mindfulness of the body, when developed and cultivated, is of great fruit and great benefit.’ This was our discussion, venerable sir, that was interrupted when the

Blessed One arrived.”

[Buddha] “And how, bhikkhus, is mindfulness of the body developed and cultivated so that it is of great fruit and great benefit?” - [MN 119.2-3]

What follows should be familiar territory. The Buddha began by describing the first tetrad in the Ānāpānasati Sutta:

“Here a bhikkhu, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, sits down; having folded his legs crosswise, set his body erect, and established mindfulness in front of him, ever mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out. Breathing in long, he understands: ‘I breathe in long’; or breathing out long, he understands: ‘I breathe out long.’ Breathing in short, he understands: ‘I breathe in short’; or breathing out short, he understands: ‘I breathe out short.’ He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body’; he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body.’ He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in tranquilizing the bodily formation’; he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out tranquilizing the bodily formation.’ As he abides thus diligent, ardent, and resolute, his memories and intentions based on the household life are abandoned; with their abandoning his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. That is how a bhikkhu develops mindfulness of the body.” - [MN 119.4]

It is always interesting to see slight changes in wording from one discourse to another. In the Ānāpānasati Sutta, the Buddha used this lovely phrase to describe forgetting about the past and future and bringing your attention solely into the present moment:

“- on that occasion a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world...” - [MN 118.24]

In this sutta, the Buddha used the somewhat more literal description:

“As he abides thus diligent, ardent, and resolute, his memories and intentions based on the household life are abandoned; with their abandoning his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. That is how a bhikkhu develops mindfulness of the body.” - [MN 119.4]

These are both excellent phrases to remember when practicing. You will find yourself, inevitably, thinking about the past or the future. You will be thinking about something you want or something you don't want or something that happened in the past that you liked or did not like or you are worried about something that might happen. These are times to recollect – be mindful – about putting those thoughts aside, “having put aside covetousness and grief.” This is how you steady the mind and get it to quiet down.

Here is also a good place to talk about the word “samadhi.” There are two closely related words in Pāli, “samadhi” and “samatha.” You will often hear that the type of meditation that the Buddha taught is called “samatha-vipassana.” “Samatha” is tranquility, and “vipassana” is insight. I think you can see this in what we have already discussed. Meditation is cycles of getting the mind quiet, and then looking at the mind. Then you get it even more quiet, and look again.

“Samadhi” is usually translated as “concentration.” There are a couple of problems with that. The first is that we often have some baggage around the word “concentration.” As Ajahn Brahm says, it reminds him of when he was in school, and his teachers reprimanded him by saying, “Concentrate!”

The other problem is that concentration seems to indicate that we are trying to focus like a laser. There is, in fact, that type of samadhi. It can be useful in special circumstances.

But the type of samadhi that the Buddha told us to cultivate is more like a spotlight than a laser. It is the whole body. And perhaps more subtly, it is the field of energy that surrounds the body. In China they call this “chi.” In the beginning, as you are developing your samadhi, you will sweep the body, looking for blockages in the energy field. As your skill increases, you will begin to feel this energy field. It will pulsate with each in-breath, and you can breathe out through the energy field on the out-breath. This is a wonderful way to cultivate the breath and to calm the mind.

And eventually, you will lose the sense of the physical body. You will only feel the energy field. Finally, in the fourth jhāna, the mind and body will become so still that you will no longer feel the in and out-breath. That is when you focus simply on the energy field. This is sometimes called the “breath body.”

One of the things that I have noticed about the Pāli language is that there is a certain generality to terms. In English, we like to be precise. But Pāli terms tend to encompass a family of ideas and concepts. Take the word “sukkha,” for example. It is usually translated as “happiness.” But it can also mean anything that is pleasant. It can also mean contented.

The word “samadhi” is like that, too. It does mean “concentration.” But it also implies absorption. Think of a time when you were completely immersed in something. Maybe it was painting, or weaving, or building a model, something like that. And the hours just slip away because you are so absorbed in what you are doing. That is also samadhi.

In Chinese they translate the word “samadhi” as something like “stop and look.” The “stop” is quieting the mind. The “look” is our inner observer. We get the mind as quiet as we can, and then we take a look and see what is happening.

So samadhi means something like a combination of concentration, absorption, and tranquilizing. Those are words we have seen the Buddha use for all of the foundations of mindfulness. We turn our attention to the body or feelings or mental formations, and then we quiet them down. We get them to settle until finally they disappear.

The Pāli Text Society dictionary says that “samadhi” is “identified with samatha.” But this is not for the end purpose of attaining stillness. It is so the still mind can see ever more subtle movements in the mind, the saṅkhāras, or mental fabrications.

And again, there are states of concentration in which perception ceases. Those states have their uses, but in samatha-vipassana meditation, those states are not the goal. They may not have much use in progressing on the path. Indeed, they may be one of those places where you can get stuck.

In the Kāyagatāsati Sutta, the Buddha next instructed us to be aware of the body in all of its activities. So unlike the Ānāpānasati Sutta, which goes on to describe the process of tranquilizing feelings and mental formations, here the Buddha borrowed from the Satipatṭhāna Sutta, and he told us to be aware of the body in all of its activities:

“Again, bhikkhus, when walking, a bhikkhu understands: ‘I am walking’; when standing, he understands: ‘I am standing’; when sitting, he understands: ‘I am sitting’; when lying down, he understands: ‘I am lying down’; or he understands accordingly however his body is disposed. As he abides thus diligent, ardent, and resolute, his memories and intentions based on the household life are abandoned...That too is how a bhikkhu develops mindfulness of the body.” - [MN 119.5]

Next he gave the practice of foulness of the body parts. This is nearly identical to the Satipatṭhāna Sutta:

“Again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu reviews this same body up from the soles of the feet and down from the top of the hair, bounded by skin, as full of many kinds of impurity thus: ‘In this body there are head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints, and urine.’ Just as though there were a bag with an opening at both ends full of many sorts of grain, such as hill rice, red rice, beans, peas, millet, and white rice, and a man with good eyes were to open it and review it thus: ‘This is hill rice, this is red rice, these are beans, these are peas, this is millet, this is white rice’; so too, a bhikkhu reviews this same body as full of many kinds of impurity thus: ‘In this body there are headhairs... and urine.’ As he abides thus diligent, ardent, and resolute, his memories and intentions based on the household life are abandoned...That too is how a bhikkhu develops mindfulness of the body.” - [MN 119.7]

Likewise, he continued with the body practices on the elements and the charnel ground contemplations.

Next, however, he described the jhānas. In the Ānāpānasati Sutta and the Satipatṭhāna Sutta he alluded to the jhānas by describing their primary factors like joy and happiness. But here he gave a full description of all four of the material jhānas. So for those of you keeping count, so far he has described:

1. Mindfulness of breathing with the body.
2. Knowing when the breath is long.
3. Knowing when the breath is short.
4. Experiencing the whole body.

5. Tranquilizing the whole body.
6. Mindfulness of the body in all of its postures and activities.
7. Foulness of the body parts.
8. The elements.
9. The charnel ground contemplations.
10. The four material jhānas.

Next the Buddha summarized the benefits of mindfulness of the body:

“Bhikkhus, anyone who has developed and cultivated mindfulness of the body has included within himself whatever wholesome states there are that partake of true knowledge. Just as anyone who has extended his mind over the great ocean has included within it whatever streams there are that flow into the ocean; so too, anyone who has developed and cultivated mindfulness of the body has included within himself whatever wholesome states there are that partake of true knowledge.” - [MN 119.22]

He finished this sutta by enumerating ten benefits of mindfulness of the body. Notice how they start with some rather accessible and – perhaps – obvious benefits. But then he described how mindfulness of the body can be used to develop psychic powers, and finally, to attain a full awakening:

1) *“One becomes a conqueror of discontent and delight, and discontent does not conquer oneself; one abides overcoming discontent whenever it arises.*

2) *“One becomes a conqueror of fear and dread, and fear and dread do not conquer oneself; one abides overcoming fear and dread whenever they arise.*

3) *“One bears cold and heat, hunger and thirst, and*

contact with gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, the sun, and creeping things; one endures ill-spoken, unwelcome words and arisen bodily feelings that are painful, racking, sharp, piercing, disagreeable, distressing, and menacing to life.

4) "One obtains at will, without trouble or difficulty, the four jhānas that constitute the higher mind and provide a pleasant abiding here and now.

5) "One wields the various kinds of supernormal power... one wields bodily mastery even as far as the Brahma-world.

6) "With the divine ear element, which is purified and surpasses the human, one hears both kinds of sounds, the divine and the human, those that are far as well as near.

7) "One understands the minds of other beings, of other persons, having encompassed them with one's own mind. One understands a mind affected by lust as affected by lust... an unliberated mind as unliberated.

8) "One recollects one's manifold past lives, that is, one birth, two births... Thus with their aspects and particulars one recollects one's manifold past lives.

9) "With the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, one sees beings passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior, fair and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate, and one understands how beings pass on according to their actions.

10) “By realizing for oneself with direct knowledge, one here and now enters upon and abides in the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom that are taintless with the destruction of the taints.” - [MN 119.33-43]

There are a few things worth pointing out here. First, item three describes being impervious to certain types of physical discomfort. Some of these can be developed even in a relatively new meditator. If you are cold, concentrate on a part of the body that is warm. Then try and spread that warmth to the rest of the body.

Likewise, if you are hot, find a spot in the body that is cool. Spread that feeling of coolness to the rest of the body. If the body is uncomfortable in some way, find a spot where there is ease and a pleasant sensation. Use this as a way to overcome the discomfort.

After describing the jhānas, the Buddha described a range of supernormal – psychic – powers. Here he seems to indicate that this is a normal part of practice. However, some people develop these powers and some do not. They are not a requirement for awakening. However, many meditators will experience some taste of one or more of these. The most common one is past life experiences. Sometimes that experience is weak. It is just a feeling. Sometimes you will see events in greater detail.

And finally, benefit number ten is the big one.

One reason that it is dangerous to concentrate too much on one sutta in the Canon is that awakening is a uniquely personal experience. That may sound funny for a discipline that emphasizes “non-self.” But as we have seen, non-self simply has to do with self-identifying with transient phenomena. That does not mean that everyone does not have a unique temperament and personality. This means that everyone’s path to awakening, and the precise experience of awakening, is also unique.

So it is important to see the many and varied ways in which the Buddha taught the path. One or another may resonate more for you. Some things

that he taught will work really well for you; others may never come into play.

Meditation is certainly not the only human endeavor that is like this. Artists and craftspeople all develop their own unique approach to what they do. They may start with the same training and the same body of knowledge, but eventually they make it their own. This is true for meditation as well. The Noble Eightfold Path is not a way to make everyone the same. It is a way for you to fully develop your own uniqueness.

*“Let not a person revive the past
Or on the future build his hopes;
For the past has been left behind
And the future has not been reached.
Instead with insight let him see
Each presently arisen state;
Let him know that and be sure of it,
Invincibly, unshakably.
Today the effort must be made;
Tomorrow Death may come, who knows?
No bargain with Mortality
Can keep him and his hordes away,
But one who dwells thus ardently,
Relentlessly, by day, by night —
It is he, the Peaceful Sage has said,
Who has had a single excellent night.”*

- [MN 131.3]

5. Postscript

"...I recall that when my father the Sakyan was occupied, while I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered upon and abided in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. Could that be the path to enlightenment? Then, following on that memory, came the realization: 'That is indeed the path to enlightenment.'" - [MN 36.31]

These are the Buddha's teachings on mindfulness and concentration, the seventh and eighth factors of the Noble Eightfold Path. There is a lot of material here and a lot of ground to cover.

There are two things worth keeping in mind. The first is that these are general instructions for a general audience. The Buddha was speaking to a large group of monks, so he was trying to lay out a full path of practice that has elements that pertain to a variety of personalities. He had mostly young monks who were susceptible to sexual desire. Many of the body practices are designed to overcome lust.

As you work with each practice, you will likely find that some are more useful for you than others. I do not think that the Buddha expected that everyone would undertake every practice. I think that he was laying out practices that a skillful meditator can use if and when necessary.

Another thing to keep in mind is that - once again - these are not a linear set of steps. The Four Foundations of Mindfulness, Mindfulness of Breathing, and jhāna interweave. Use your discernment to practice in a way that makes sense for you. For example, in my own practice I am weak at staying in the body and I have poor concentration, so that is

mainly what I do. I also have an aversive temperament, so I work a lot with mettā. But every once in a while you may want to work with something different like the contemplation on the elements or the 32 parts of the body. Try something and see what it yields.

This all culminates in the practice of jhāna. Attaining jhāna may take quite a while. I believe that the first time that you attain jhāna, it will be very difficult to do so unless you are on retreat. There are always exceptions, but I think for most people this will be true. I worked on jhāna for many years before I first attained it. But by the time I went on a retreat and attained jhāna, I was really primed. It only took me a few days to get there. But your mileage may vary.

Be kind to yourself. Enjoy the ride. Love yourself. It takes an extraordinary person to undertake this practice. You are that person. The practice will become easier over time, but it will always have its challenges. You have the weight of the Buddhist Saṅgha behind you. This includes everyone who has done this practice starting with the Buddha himself. And there is no more noble aim than to attain awakening.

Those who

Fully cultivate the Factors of Awakening,

Give up grasping,

Enjoy non-clinging,

And have destroyed the toxins,

Are luminous,

And completely liberated in this life.

- [Dhp 89]

Appendices

Appendix A - Glossary of Terms

Abhidhamma (Pāli, Sanskrit: Abhidharma)

The *Abhidhamma* is the third of the “three baskets” in the Pāli Canon, although scholars date it to 100 to 200 years after the time of the Buddha. It has been variously described as philosophy, psychology, and metaphysics. The *Abhidhamma* is highly revered in the Theravada tradition, and highly criticized in the others (!).

Ajahn (also *Ajaan*)

Thai word meaning “teacher.” In Buddhism it is a monk who has at least ten years of seniority.

Aṅguttara Nikāya

Literally *Increased by One Collection*, but usually translated as *Numerical Discourses*. It is the second of the five *nikāyas*, or collections, in the Sutta Pitaka of the Pāli Canon. The *Aṅguttara Nikāya* is organized in eleven books according to the number of items referenced in them (i.e., the Four Noble Truths is in the Book of Fours).

arahant (Pāli, Sanskrit: arahat)

Literally “one who is worthy,” a perfected person, i.e., one who has attained nirvāṇa.

awakening

Also called “enlightenment.” It is a sudden insight into transcendent, ultimate truth. This is the goal of the Buddha’s system of training. After awakening one is free from un-necessary suffering, and after death is free from all suffering. In Buddhist cosmology a fully awakened person, or “arahant,” is free from the rounds of rebirth.

Bhante (Pāli)

Literally “Venerable Sir.” A senior Buddhist monastic who has been ordained at least ten years. Although it is a masculine term it is gender neutral and is used for both monks and nuns.

bhikkhu (Pāli, Sanskrit: bhikṣu)

Literally “beggar.” An ordained Buddhist monk. However the term can also refer to anyone following the Buddhist path. When the Buddha gave a talk he would address it to the highest ranking persons there. The rank order was 1) monks, 2) nuns, 3) lay men, and 4) lay women. Thus if even one monk were present, he would address the talk to “bhikkhus.”

Bodhisatta (Pāli, Sanskrit: Bodhisattva)

The term used by the Buddha to refer to himself both in his previous lives and as a young man in his current life, prior to his awakening, in the period during which he was working towards his own liberation.

deva

In the Buddhist cosmology devas are gods or heavenly beings that live in the realm just above humans.

Dharma (Sanskrit, Pāli: dhamma)

In Buddhism, the word “dharma” can have three different

meanings. The first meaning is the *universal nature of how things are*. At the time of the Buddha, each religious school had its own Dharma, or understanding of how things are. The second meaning of Dharma is the *teachings of the Buddha*. The third meaning is *phenomena*. Buddhism sees everything in terms of causes and affects. Mental activities, for example, are *dharmas*. When referring to the teachings of the Buddha, the word *Dharma* is capitalized. When referring to phenomena, it is not capitalized.

Dhammapada-aṭṭhakatha (“aṭṭhakathā” is Pāli for explanation, commentary)

Commentary to the Dhammapada.

Digha Nikāya

The “Long Discourses” (Pāli *digha* = “long”). It is the first of the five *nikāyas*, or collections, in the Sutta Pitaka of the Pāli Canon. Pāli scholar Joy Manné makes the argument that the *Digha Nikāya* was particularly intended to make converts (Bhikkhu Bodhi pointedly refers to this as “for the purpose of propaganda”), with its high proportion of debates and devotional material.

Eight Precepts

These are lay precepts for people who want to practice more intensively. They are often observed on Uposatha Days. The additional precepts (to the Five Precepts) are: 1) refrain from eating after noon, 2) refraining from entertainment, wearing jewelry or using perfumes, and 3) sleeping on luxurious beds or over-sleeping.

fetters

Literally a “chain” that shackles one to the rounds of rebirth. The fetters are 1) self-identity view, 2) attachment to rites and rituals, 3) doubt, 4) sense desire, 5) ill will 6) desire for material existence, 7) desire for immaterial existence, 8) conceit, 9) restlessness, and 10)

ignorance.

Five Faculties

Also called the “Five Strengths” or the “Five Spiritual Faculties.” They are 1) faith, 2) energy (vigor/diligence), 3) mindfulness, 4) concentration, and 5) wisdom.

Four Foundations of Mindfulness

Also called the Four Establishings of Mindfulness, and the Four Frames of Reference. The Four Foundations of Mindfulness are 1) the body, 2) feelings, or “feeling tones,” 3) mental formations, and 4) mental phenomena.

jhāna (Pāli, Sanskrit: dhyāna)

“meditative absorption.” The jhānas are states of high concentration. In the final formulation there are four “material” jhānas and four “immaterial” jhānas.

kōan (Japanese, also kung-an)

A kōan is a riddle or puzzle that Zen Buddhists use during meditation to overcome conceptual thinking in order to unravel a greater truth.

Majjhima Nikāya

The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha. It is the second of the five *nikāyas*, or collections, in the Sutta Pitaka of the Pāli Canon. It is generally believed to be the most important collection of discourses in the Canon. The *Majjhima Nikāya* corresponds to the *Madhyama Āgama* which survives in two Chinese translations. Fragments also exist in Sanskrit and Tibetan.

Māra (Pāli, Sanskrit)

Literally “bringer of death.” Māra is a deity who embodies the ability of experience, especially sensory experience, to seduce and trap the mind, particularly to prevent the cessation of suffering.

nibbāna (Pāli, Sanskrit: nirvāṇa)

Nibbāna is one of the terms that is used to define the goal of the Buddhist path. It literally means “to extinguish,” and means to extinguish the three flames of greed, hatred, and delusion.

non-returner (Pāli, Sanskrit: anāgāmi)

The third of four stages of awakening. A non-returner eliminates the fourth and fifth “fetters” – sense craving and ill-will – and will become an arahant with no more rebirths in the material realm.

once-returner (Pāli: sakadāgāmin, Sanskrit: sakṛdāmin)

The second of four stages of awakening. A once-returner has weakened the fourth and fifth “fetters” – sense craving and ill-will – and will become an arahant with no more than one more rebirth in the material realm.

Pāli Canon

The Pāli Canon is the collection of Buddhist texts preserved in the Pāli language. It consists of three *Pitakas*, or “baskets.” These are the *Vinaya Pitaka* (the monastic code), the *Sutta Pitaka* (the discourses of the Buddha and his senior disciples), and the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, a later work that is variously described as Buddhist philosophy, psychology, and metaphysics. The Abhidhamma Pitaka is unique to Theravada, or southern, Buddhism; the other collections have versions in the Chinese and Tibetan Canons.

parinibbāna (Pāli, Sanskrit: parinirvāṇa)

Literally “nibbāna after death.” When the body of an arahant dies,

this frees the being from saṃsara, the rounds of rebirth.

Pātimokkha (Pāli, Sanskrit: Prātimokṣa)

Literally “towards liberation.” It is the list of monastic rules in the Vinaya.

Saṅgha (Pāli, Sanskrit: saṅgha)

Literally “community.” At the time of the Buddha the term Saṅgha referred either to the community of monastics (monks and nuns) or the noble Saṅgha, which is the community of people who are stream-enterers, once-returners, non-returners, and arahants.

Satipaṭṭhāna (Pāli)

The “Four Foundations of Mindfulness”: (1) the body, (2), feelings/sensations, (3) mental formations (thoughts and emotions), and (4) *dharma*s, or phenomena.

Samāṇa (Pāli, Sanskrit: Śramaṇa)

A wandering ascetic.

Samyutta Nikāya

The Connected Discourses. It is the third of the five *nikāyas*, or collections, in the Sutta Piṭaka of the Pāli Canon. *The Samyutta Nikāya* consists of fifty-six chapters, each governed by a unifying theme that binds together the Buddha’s suttas or discourses.

Seven Factors of Awakening (enlightenment)

(1) Mindfulness, (2) investigation, (3) energy, (4) joy/rapture, (5) tranquility, (6) concentration, and (7) equanimity.

stream-entry (Pāli: sotāpanna, Sanskrit: srotāpanna)

The first of four stages of awakening. A stream-enterer overcomes the first three “fetters” – self view, attachment to rites and rituals and skeptical doubt – and will become an arahant in no more than seven lifetimes with no rebirths in the lower realms.

sutta (Pāli, Sanskrit: sutra)

A discourse of the Buddha or one of his disciples. The Pāli word “sutta” refers specifically to the Pāli Canon. The words “sutta” and the Sanskrit form “sutra” literally mean “thread,” and are related to the English word “suture.”

Tathāgata (Pāli, Sanskrit)

A word the Buddha used when referring to himself. It’s literal meaning is ambiguous. It can mean either “thus gone” (tathā-gata) or “thus come” (tathā-āgata). It is probably intentionally ambiguous, meaning that the Buddha, having attained a final awakening, was beyond all comings and goings.

Upāsaka (masculine), **Upāsikā** (feminine) (Pāli, Sanskrit)

Literally “attendant.” A lay follower of the Buddha, one who has taken and keeps the Five Precepts.

Uposatha (Pāli, Sanskrit: Upavasatha)

Traditionally held on the new moon and full moon days of the lunar month. This is the day when monastics gather to recite the Pātimokkha (monastic rules) and confess any transgressions. Lay people observe either the Five Precepts or, if they spend the day at a temple or monastery, the Eight Precepts.

Visuddhimagga (Pāli)

Literally, *The Path of Purification*. The *Visuddhimagga* is a Theravada commentarial work attributed to the monk Buddhaghosa, who

formulated it in Sri Lanka in the fifth century CE.

Appendix B - Bibliography

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Appendix C - Jhāna in the Majjhima Nikāya

(This is a paper I wrote in 2014. It provides a detailed look at the role of jhāna in the Buddha's teaching.)

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to quantify the teaching of jhāna and to put it into context. The methodology is to use the *Majjhima Nikāya* as the main source, go through all the suttas, note which ones reference jhāna, and to also note what other teachings of the Buddha are referenced alongside of the jhānas. The result is the spreadsheet at the end.

In order to make the case for jhāna, I will first talk about what jhāna practice is – both canonically and in current thinking and teaching – and also to talk about the *Majjhima Nikāya* and the Pāli canon to put the basic source material in context.

What is Jhāna?

The jhānas are described by the Buddha as right concentration, the eighth part of the noble eightfold path:

“And what, friends, is right concentration? Here, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. With the stilling of applied and sustained thought, he enters upon and abides in the second jhāna, which has self-confidence and singleness of mind without

applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of concentration. With the fading away as well of rapture, he abides in equanimity, and mindful and fully aware, still feeling pleasure with the body, he enters upon and abides in the third jhāna, on account of which noble ones announce: 'He has a pleasant abiding who has equanimity and is mindful.' With the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, he enters upon and abides in the fourth jhāna, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity. This is called right concentration." - [MN 141.31]

Jhāna is – I think properly - often translated as “meditative absorption”.

Most Buddhists are familiar with the story of the Buddha’s enlightenment. The Buddha almost died doing severe ascetic practices. His description of himself at that time is quite graphic and not for a weak stomach. Eventually he decided that these severe austerities could not be the way out of suffering. It was at this point that he remembered an incident from when he was a boy where he entered a state of bliss:

“I considered: ‘I recall that when my father the Sakyan was occupied, while I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered upon and abided in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. Could that be the path to enlightenment?’ Then, following on that memory, came the realization: ‘That is indeed the path to enlightenment.’

I thought: ‘Why am I afraid of that pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome

states?’ I thought: ‘I am not afraid of that pleasure since it has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states.’ - [MN 36.31-32]

It was the distinction between sense pleasures and pleasure born of seclusion that got him started on the correct path to awakening. Thānissaro Bhikkhu explains it this way. There is pleasure that leads to unwholesome actions, and there is pleasure that leads to wholesome actions. “Wholesome” means, generally, ethical, moral, virtuous, and selfless. Sense pleasure leads to unwholesome actions, i.e., thoughts, words and deeds that are born of greed, hatred or delusion. The pleasure that comes from meditative absorption inclines the mind to tranquility, contentment, and equanimity, which provide a basis for generosity, patience, wisdom, compassion, and so forth.

The Buddha subsequently nursed himself back to health because “It is not easy to attain that pleasure with a body so excessively emaciated” [MN 33], and ultimately he mastered the four jhānas. On the night of his enlightenment, he practiced the four jhānas as a way to sharpen his mind, and with this focused mind he realized the Three Knowledges that lead to his awakening:

“When my concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to knowledge of the recollection of past lives. I recollected my manifold past lives, that is, one birth, two births... Thus with their aspects and particulars I recollected my manifold past lives.

“This was the first true knowledge attained by me in the first watch of the night.” - [MN 36.38-39]

...

“When my concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings... Thus with the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, I saw beings passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior, fair and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate, and I understood how beings pass on according to their actions.

“This was the second true knowledge attained by me in the middle watch of the night.” - [MN 36.40-41]

...

*“When my concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to knowledge of the destruction of the taints. I directly knew as it actually is: ‘This is suffering’;...‘This is the origin of suffering’;...‘This is the cessation of suffering’;...‘This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering’;...‘These are the taints’;...‘This is the origin of the taints’;...‘This is the cessation of the taints’;...‘This is the way leading to the cessation of the taints... This was the third true knowledge attained by me in the last watch of the night.”
- [MN 36.42, 44]*

So it was with a mind “thus purified” by the jhāna practice that the Buddha became enlightened, became awakened, became the Buddha.

This formula – the four jhānas followed by the Three Knowledges that constitute the Buddha’s awakening – is repeated a number of times in the *Majjhima Nikāya*. These instances can be seen by looking at the

spreadsheet. 25 of the 152 suttas in the *Majjhima Nikāya* contain this formula, or some equivalent thereof.

The suttas give the standard formula as quoted above. For each jhāna, there are “jhāna factors”:

1. First jhāna: applied and sustained thought, rapture and pleasure
2. Second jhāna: self-confidence and singleness of mind, rapture and pleasure
3. Third jhāna: pleasure and equanimity
4. Fourth jhāna: equanimity

As the meditator progresses from jhāna to jhāna, the process gets simpler and the number of factors gets fewer. This is consistent with the whole of Buddhist meditation. As the skill of the meditator increases, it is not so much that the mind acquires anything, but it is more that the mind sheds states that lead to stress and suffering. It is a process of simplification.

Having said that, there is some debate among those who practice jhāna about what constitutes true jhāna. There are basically two main camps:

“The first broad categorization[s] would be into "Sutta Style Jhānas" and "Visuddhimagga Style Jhānas". These two phrases are not ideal, but I use them until someone comes up with a better pair. "Visuddhimagga Style Jhānas" use a nimitta for access and involve very deep concentration. "Sutta Style Jhānas" do not require a nimitta and involve more accessible states of concentration.

The Jhānas as discussed in the suttas are accessible to many people. The suttas seem to indicate that they were just part of the monastics' training program; thus they were not a big deal and were accessible to many.

However, the Visuddhimagga states in section XII.8 that

of those who undertake the meditation path, only one in 1,000,000 (at best) can reach absorption 1. We don't have to take this figure literally to begin to understand that the Jhānas as discussed in the Visuddhimagga are of a much deeper level of concentration than those described in the suttas. Basically, the Jhānas as described in the Visuddhimagga seem to be much more developed and systematized than those of the suttas. Even the factors given for the first four Jhānas are not the same..."
– Leigh Brasington

The passage that Leigh references in the *Visuddhimagga* is this:

"The arousing of the sign is difficult for one who has done the preliminary work and only one in a hundred or a thousand can do it. To extend the sign when it has arisen and to reach absorption is difficult and only one in a hundred or a thousand can do it. To tame one's mind in the fourteen ways after reaching absorption is difficult and only one in a hundred or a thousand can do it. Rapid response after attaining transformation is difficult and only one in a hundred or a thousand can do it." -
[Visuddhimagga, XII.8]

Given the math in the *Visuddhimagga*, where only 1 in 1,000,000 can reach absorption, it is unlikely that this is what the Buddha meant by jhāna. As Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu points out, when monks were told to go meditate, they were specifically told to "do jhāna":

"When they depict the Buddha telling his disciples to go meditate, they never quote him as saying 'go do vipassana,' but always 'go do jhāna.'" - [Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, "[One Tool Among Many](#)"]

All of the monks and nuns in the Buddha's time, then, were practicing jhāna.

Broad body awareness is consistent with the canonical descriptions, and it is also consistent with the teaching in the "Ānāpānasati Sutta: Mindfulness of Breathing" [MN 118], which is perhaps the Buddha's most complete teaching on meditation. (This is along with the "Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta: The Foundations of Mindfulness" [DN 22, MN 10] and the "Kāyagatāsati Sutta: Mindfulness of the Body" [MN 119]. However, it is widely believed that Ānāpānasati – mindfulness of the breathing – is how the Buddha himself attained awakening.) In this sutta, the first four steps are as follows:

1. Note when the breaths are short.
2. Note when the breaths are long.
3. Become aware of the whole body.
4. "Calm", or "tranquilize" the whole body.

In other words, the start to a meditation practice is to learn how to develop serenity, tranquility, calm. This leads to the next two steps in the Buddha's instructions:

5. rapture ("pīti" in Pāli)
6. happiness ("sukha" in Pāli)

Rapture is the primary factor in the first jhāna, and happiness is the primary factor in the second jhāna.

Thus, the teachings on jhāna are also consistent with the Buddha's instructions for meditation in the Ānāpānasati Sutta, teachings that include "becoming aware of the whole body", and "calming the whole body."

Further, there is even some indication that the *Visuddhimagga* type of jhāna may be counterproductive, even dangerous. I heard a story about a long-time meditator who got so concentrated that he could no longer do his volunteer job at the retreat center. Since volunteer jobs are quite

mundane – something like chopping vegetables – clearly that is an unhealthy level of concentration.

Thānissaro Bhikkhu even goes this far:

“Everybody I know who has done that kind of practice has gone pretty wacko...

“You are getting this little dot of light that you see whether you have your eyes open or your eyes closed, it’s kind of there in your awareness, and it begins to erase the distinction between inside and outside. People like this will sometimes think something and think they also said it and get upset because they think you are not responding, or conversely they think they are just thinking something and actually say it out loud. Whereas with the whole body you are very much in your whole body.”

Fears About Jhāna

Buddhism in the West has largely run away from the teaching of jhāna, but I think that one reason for this is thinking of jhāna as the *Visuddhimagga* style of practice.

The two most common concerns that I hear about jhāna are 1) that people will become addicted – attached - to jhāna, and 2) that they will mistake it for awakening.

The Buddha himself warned against complacency. That is not quite the same thing as becoming attached. It is more like becoming prematurely satisfied with your progress along the path. This is the theme of “Mahāsāropama Sutta: The Greater Discourse on the Simile of the Heartwood” [MN 29]:

“Being diligent, he achieves the attainment of concentration. He is pleased with that attainment of concentration and his intention is fulfilled. On account of it he lauds himself and disparages others thus: ‘I am concentrated, my mind is unified, but these other bhikkhus are unconcentrated, with their minds astray.’ He becomes intoxicated with that attainment of concentration, grows negligent, falls into negligence, and being negligent, he lives in suffering.” – [MN 29.4]

As for mistaking jhāna for enlightenment, this is quite possible. The rapture of the first jhāna can be quite overwhelming. I know of many cases where people who claimed to have attained awakening broke the precepts, usually through sexual indiscretion. According to the Buddha, it is impossible for an awakened person to do this. In his discussion of stream-entry, the Buddha says this about a person who has attained this first stage of awakening:

“He possesses the virtues dear to the noble ones — unbroken, untorn, unblemished, unmottled, freeing, praised by the wise, ungrasped, leading to concentration.” - [SN 55.1]

This is why it is important to be properly instructed in the practice. However, if properly instructed, when you are in jhāna it is clear what is happening and that you are not awakened, that it is a conditioned state. Further, it seems quite clear that being in a conditioned state, there is nothing to which to become attached. It is simply a tool.

Insight and Concentration

Classically in Buddhism there is a distinction that is made between concentration – jhāna – practice and vipassana – insight - practice. Traditionally the distinction between the two is made rather sharply. You are either doing one or the other. In concentration practice, your attention

is on one thing only, to the exclusion of everything else. In insight practice, the mind is free to notice whatever is arising.

However, the Buddha taught that concentration and insight should be developed together. Thānissaro Bhikkhu notes that concentration and insight are meant to arise in a balanced way. You don't master concentration, for example, and then turn your attention to doing insight practice. You develop some concentration, and then you develop some insight (or the other way around). You develop more insight, and that allows you to become more deeply concentrated.

This does not happen exactly in lockstep, but as one develops, it tends to drag the other one along with it, and that process can work either way. Insight can lead to better concentration, and deeper concentration can lead to deeper insight.

These two things—serenity and insight—occur in him yoked evenly together. - [MN 149.10]

If you don't practice in this way, you can get out of balance. Likewise, if you do only "insight" practices, your progress may be held back by a lack of concentration. As seen by the Buddha's own experience, it was the mind "thus purified" by jhāna that gave him the ability to awaken.

It is also worth noting what precisely is meant by "insight". In a Buddhist context, insight refers to one of the supermundane teachings, such as dependent origination (the Buddha's law of causality), or the three marks of conditioned existence. These are *anicca*, *anāta* and *dukkha*, that is, that all conditioned things are impermanent (the only unconditioned thing is nirvana), that all conditioned things are "not-self" (i.e., they lack a permanent essence), and that – mainly because they are conditioned and not-self – they are ultimately unsatisfactory.

This does not mean that meditation cannot lead to more mundane insights, such as how to handle your problematical Uncle Harry or your job. These mundane insights can and do occur in meditation. But the real

prize is insights that you get into the supermundane.

You can actually enter jhāna, or at least its predecessor “access concentration,” while doing what is nominally an insight practice. Likewise, it is possible to have insight while doing jhāna practice.

Ṭhānissaro also notes that you shouldn’t worry a lot about when to do concentration practice and when to do insight practice. These issues tend to take care of themselves. However, in order for that to happen, you need to be well versed in right view. Right view gives you the roadmap, and if you don’t have a map, you won’t know where you are or where to go. Of course, you can’t understand all of the Buddha’s teachings at once, either, so once again the factors of the path “co-arise.” You start with right view – the first part of the noble eightfold path – and understand it as best you can. Then as your skill increases, you come back to right view over and over again, gaining a deeper understanding each time. This is true for all of the path factors. Buddhist training is an iterative, non-linear process.

This relates to an important point in Buddhist practice, and that is what is commonly called the “holographic nature” of the Buddha’s teachings. Buddhism is famous for its many lists, and this can give the impression that the path is like a row of dominoes, one leading to the next. But Buddhist practice isn’t like that. If you work on any of the path factors or the factors of enlightenment or any other list with which you care to begin, you will also be developing all of the other factors. And it is worth continually evaluating your practice to see where you may need to strengthen one or another factor. This is especially true when it comes to insight and concentration practice. If you are working too much on one, it may be time to work on the other. This is part of the art – for it is art – of meditation, keeping everything as balanced as possible.

The Pāli Canon

The Pāli Canon has come to be associated with the Theravada (path of the elders) tradition, also called the southern tradition of Buddhism. The

southern tradition stands in contrast to the eastern, Chinese tradition – the Mahayana – which includes Zen Buddhism, and the northern, mainly Tibetan tradition, the Vajrayana, also called Tantric Buddhism. However, associating the Pāli Canon with the Theravada would be a misunderstanding of how the different schools of Buddhism evolved, and the role of the earliest canonical literature in later Buddhist developments.

Modern scholarship puts the death of the Buddha at 400 B.C.E. Until about 150-100 B.C.E there was only “one” canonical literature. The “one” has to be quoted because in different regions of India there were some differences in the precise inventory of discourses. This may be simply because as the Buddha traveled around, some discourses may have been heard in one region and carried forward, while they may not have ever been learned in other regions. Nonetheless, the basic inventory of discourses would have been similar throughout India.

At around 150-100 B.C.E new discourses started to be composed. This continued for the next 400-500 years. These would eventually make up the Mahayana. Monks and nuns who believed that both sets of discourses were the word of the Buddha would later form the Mahayana tradition. Those who believed that only the original discourses were the word of the Buddha would later become the Theravada tradition. However, in India in the first millennium, monks and nuns of both schools would have studied and lived together in the same monasteries. Thus the distinction between the two was not sharply divided.

Tantric Buddhism – what is here being called “northern Buddhism” – grew out of the Mahayana tradition. It started about 1,000 years after the Buddha. Thus it, too, brought with it the original discourses – along with the newer Mahayana discourses - although by the time Tantric Buddhism made it to Tibet, only a portion of the canon was translated. These discourses exist today as the *Kanjur* (“The Translation of the Word”) and the *Tenjur* (“Translation of Treatises”). [Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*].

The important point here is that all traditions and schools of Buddhism accepted the early canonical literature as part of the teachings. Later developments were seen as a further development of the Buddha's teaching, not a way to replace it.

One reason that the canon has come to be associated with Theravada Buddhism is that currently only the Pāli version – the one preserved by the Theravada – is available in English translation. It was first translated in the 19th century by the Pāli Text Society (PTS) in editions that are still available, although they often contain quaint Victorian language that is a little hard to follow. (They also, rather amusingly, occasionally leave out racier sections that would have offended Victorian sensibilities.) More recently we have the superb translations of Bhikkhu Bodhi (*Majjhima Nikāya* jointly with his mentor Bhikkhu Nanamoli, *Samyutta Nikāya*, and *Anguttara Nikāya*) and Maurice Walsh (*Digha Nikāya*). There are also partial translations by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu in a series called *A Handful of Leaves*. It is very useful to compare translations.

The German monk Ajahn Anālayo is currently working on translating the Chinese versions, the *Agamas*, into English. The *Agamas* are translations of Sanskrit originals. As Buddhism became more widespread in India, the discourses were translated into Sanskrit (from Pāli, or perhaps the local dialect, old Magadhi), and as Buddhism moved into China it was these that were translated into Chinese. While Sanskrit and Pāli are very closely related, it is still remarkable how similar the Chinese versions are to the Pāli ones. Very few Sanskrit originals exist. As the Muslims moved into India at the end of the first millennium, they were particularly harsh on the Buddhists, destroying the great Buddhist universities, temples, and libraries.

The Oral Tradition

Considering the time that has passed since the life of the Buddha and the great distances that the Buddhist canon has traveled, it is remarkable how coherent it is, and how similar these different collections – the Pāli, Chinese and Tibetan – are. While there are variations - particularly in the

sequence of events described in different versions of a discourse – the meaning remains fundamentally the same.

Ajahn Anālayo notes that this is consistent with how human memory works. Buddhism is an oral tradition. These works were memorized, starting with when they were given by the Buddha and his disciples. Human memory tends to remember the sense of a thing but doesn't always get the details right. Getting things out of order is very common, and that would be consistent with the types of discrepancies you see in the Pāli version of a discourse compared to its Chinese equivalent.

(Note: For an example of comparing different versions of a discourse, see Ajahn Anālayo's book *Perspectives on Satipaṭṭhāna*.)

One thing that is hard for westerners to grasp is how efficient the system of memorization is in India, a tradition that exists to this day. I had an opportunity to experience this first hand when I was in India. I was walking around Bodh Gaya with a 12-year-old boy who had attached himself to me. He was from the village of Uruvela, where a legendary young girl named Sujatta is credited with nursing the Buddha back to health prior to his enlightenment. Her stupa is still there. I asked the boy if he knew the story of Sujatta, whereupon he recited the entire story verbatim as he had been taught. In typically Indian fashion, to "know" something is to have memorized it.

One of the things that Ajahn Anālayo points out about the difference between how Hindus memorize their texts and how Buddhist memorize theirs, is that in Hinduism they want the texts memorized before they can be understood. This is why Hindu priests start their training at such a young age, typically no later than the age of 12. The emphasis here is on literal memorization of the texts.

Buddhism took a different approach and didn't want the texts memorized until they could be understood. The emphasis here was on the meaning, and not the literal memorization. This speaks to the practical nature of Buddhism. The most important thing is to become

enlightened – awakened – and not to preserve a doctrine, religion, or philosophy.

If you have ever seen how Hindu priests are trained you get a sense of how preserving texts in this way is done. The young boys memorize and recite passage after passage. This is done both in a group and individually in front of the group. It is very structured.

In the west there is not much emphasis on the ability to memorize. However this skill can quickly be developed. In his book *Jewish Meditation*, Aryeh Kaplan tells a story about being in rabbinical school when he and some friends decided to memorize portions of the Talmud:

*“...when I was in yeshivah, a few friends and I decided to have a contest to see who could memorize the most pages of the Talmud. For me, it was an interesting experience. The first page took considerable effort and time, perhaps several hours. As I continued, each page became progressively easier. Eventually, after ten pages or so, I found that I could memorize a page after three or four readings. By the time I had gone through some twenty pages, I could memorize a page with a single reading. What had originally been extremely difficult had become relatively easy. My friends reported the same experience.” - [Kaplan, *Jewish Meditation*]*

Further, in cultures with oral traditions, certain linguistic mechanisms are used to make it easier to memorize. The technical term for this is “oral-formulaic composition.” Stock phrases and meters are used to express the same ideas in different contexts. Anyone who has read the Pāli canonical literature quickly gets used to this. The text that explains jhāna itself is one of these examples. This tradition is not unique to India. Medieval Irish, Celtic and Anglo-Saxons spontaneously composed poetry in this way. In more modern times Allen Ginsberg also composed poetry in this way. Thus, in cultures with oral traditions, there is a “language

technology” that facilitates memorization.

In Buddhism there was a further development, and that was the role of the “bhanaka”. The Pāli canon is quite large. The PTS edition is 55 volumes. Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translation of the *Majjhima Nikāya* is over 1100 pages. The *Samyutta Nikāya* is twice as long. So to make the preservation of the texts easier, some monks and groups of monks (mainly it was monks) specialized in preserving one collection. These were called “bhanakas.” A monk who specialized in the *Digha Nikāya* would be called a “Dighabhanaka,” a monk who specialized in the *Majjhima Nikāya* would be a “Majjhimabhanaka,” and so forth. Some monks were able to memorize the entire canon. Reputedly there are four or five monks in the world today who have done so. However this was and is very rare, and usually the collections were divided up for preservation.

The Importance of the Majjhima Nikāya

The Sutta Pitaka – literally the “discourse basket” – of the Pāli Canon contains five collections, or “nikāyas”:

1. Digha Nikāya – the “Long Discourses”
2. Majjhima Nikāya – the “Medium Discourses”
3. Samyutta Nikāya – the “Connected Discourses”
4. Anguttara Nikāya – the “Numerical Discourses”
5. Khuddaka Nikāya – the “Collection of Little Texts”, which contains 18 volumes

(In the humorous spirit of the Pāli Canon, the “Collection of Little Texts” includes volumes like the *Jātaka Tales* which is over 3,000 pages in English translation.)

While the *Digha* and *Majjhima Nikāyas* seem to be divided by the length of the discourses, Pāli scholar Joy Manné makes the argument that these two volumes serve specific purposes. She argues that the *Digha Nikāya* was particularly intended to make converts (Bhikkhu Bodhi pointedly refers to this as “for the purpose of propaganda”!), with its high

proportion of debates and devotional material. She further argues that the *Majjhima Nikāya* was particularly intended to give a solid grounding in the teaching to converts, with a high proportion of sermons and consultations.

The *Samyutta Nikāya* and the *Anguttara Nikāya* then, provide short, “pithy” teachings that are intended for an audience that already has a firm grounding in the Buddha’s doctrine.

Thus the *Majjhima Nikāya* serves as the introductory and intermediate course in Buddhadhamma for disciples. The *Samyutta Nikāya* and the *Anguttara Nikāya* are the graduate level course.

For a firm overview, therefore, of what the Buddha taught, the *Majjhima Nikāya* serves as the best single volume. That is why here it serves as the basis for understanding the role of jhāna in the Buddha’s teaching.

The Methodology

Looking for references to jhāna in the *Majjhima Nikāya* is, unfortunately, not simply a matter of looking for the word “jhāna”, which is particularly easy with an electronic edition of the book. There are cases where either the jhāna factors are described without the actual term jhāna being used. An example of this is in the “Vattūphana Sutta: The Simile of the Cloth” [MN 7]:

“When he has given up, expelled, released, abandoned, and relinquished [the imperfections of the mind] in part, he considers thus: ‘I am possessed of unwavering confidence in the Buddha,’ and he gains inspiration in the meaning, gains inspiration in the Dhamma, gains gladness connected with the Dhamma. When he is glad, rapture is born in him; in one who is rapturous, the body becomes tranquil; one whose body is tranquil feels pleasure; in one who feels pleasure, the mind becomes

concentrated.”

Another case is where a technical Pāli term is used that means jhāna. For example, in the “Mūlapariyāyavagga Sutta: The Root of all Things” [MN 1], the term “unity” is used, which the footnote tells us:

“The emphasis on unity (ekatta), MA informs us, is characteristic of one who attains the jhānas...”

Another term that is used that is a synonym for jhāna is “imperturbable”, a term that first occurs in the “Sunakkhatta Sutta: To Sunakkhatta” [MN 105]:

“It is possible, Sunakkhatta, that some person here may be intent on the imperturbable. When a person is intent on the imperturbable, only talk concerning that interests him, and his thinking and pondering are in line with that, and he associates with that kind of person, and he finds satisfaction in that. But when talk about worldly material things is going on, he will not listen to it or give it ear or exert his mind to understand it. He does not associate with that kind of person, and he does not find satisfaction in that.”

The “imperturbable” is a technical term “for the meditative attainments from the fourth jhāna through the four immaterial attainments...”

Thus, the exercise of finding all references to jhāna in the text must tease out all of the explicit references to jhāna as well as the implicit ones.

The spreadsheet makes note of the implied references. If all four jhānas are implied, the jhāna columns will have the following notation:

<----- I ----->

If the implication is for a specific jhāna, then the column will have an “R”

(reference) in it rather than an “X”. An “X” always means an explicit reference that uses the term “jhāna.”

(The other notation you will see on the spreadsheet is the number “2”, which means that the jhāna is explicitly referenced twice in the sutta.)

Conversely, some editorial judgments were made as to whether or not to consider a reference to imply jhāna. In the “Mahāsāropama Sutta: The Greater Discourse on the Simile of the Heartwood” [MN 29], for example, it seems rather obvious that jhāna is implied:

“Being diligent, he achieves the attainment of concentration. He is pleased with that attainment of concentration and his intention is fulfilled.”

It seems even clearer when reading the entire text in context that jhāna is implied. However, because the footnotes do not reference jhāna, and the jhāna factors are not itemized, references of this type were not included.

Thus in summary, a reference to jhāna was included in the following cases:

1. An explicit reference that uses the term “jhāna”.
2. An implicit reference where the jhāna factors are listed but the term “jhāna” is not used.
3. An implicit reference where the footnote states that the technical Pāli term specifically implies jhāna.

The spreadsheet also contains information about what other Buddhist teachings are referenced along with jhāna. These are the headings along the top of the spreadsheet. Again, some editorial license was used to include certain topics and exclude others. Generally, if a topic was only referenced in one or two suttas, it was left out of the spreadsheet. There was also some arbitrary discretion.

A final note about the spreadsheet is that you will see the sutta numbers in the first column along with the paragraph numbers for the jhāna

references. Thus you can look them up and read them for yourself, something that I highly encourage.

Conclusions

The Importance of Jhāna in The Buddha's Teaching

The first and most obvious conclusion to be drawn from this exercise is how important jhāna is in the Buddha's teaching. What I intuitively sensed when I first read the *Majjhima Nikāya* is abundantly clear when quantifying and qualifying jhāna references in the *Majjhima Nikāya*.

Of the 152 suttas in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, 62 of them reference jhāna, explicitly or implicitly. Perhaps even more interesting is how in 25 of the suttas the formula for the Buddha's enlightenment includes references to jhāna. (This is on the basis of references to both jhāna and one or more of the Three Knowledges.)

There has traditionally been some controversy over whether or not jhāna is required for awakening. I don't think that there is anything in the Pāla Canon that states categorically that this is the case. However, there is quite a lot of evidence that jhāna is essential, and that attaining even the first stage of awakening – stream-entry – is very difficult without mastering the four material jhānas. In the *Anguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha says that awakening is possible by attaining only the first jhāna:

“When it was said: ‘Bhikkhus, I say that the destruction of the taints occurs in dependence on the first jhāna,’ for what reason was this said? Here, secluded from sensual pleasures... a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the first jhāna... He considers whatever phenomena exist there pertaining to form, feeling, perception, volitional activities, and consciousness as impermanent, suffering, an illness, a boil, a dart, misery, affliction, alien,

disintegrating, empty, and non-self. He turns his mind away from those phenomena and directs it to the deathless element thus: 'This is peaceful, this is sublime, that is, the stilling of all activities, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, nibbāna.' If he is firm in this, he attains the destruction of the taints." - [AN 9.36]

And Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu says this:

*One qualification here is that it is not necessary to master all the levels of concentration in order to gain Awakening. The relationship of concentration to discernment is a controversial issue... but here we may simply note that many texts [AN9.36] point out that the experience of the first jhāna can be a sufficient basis for the discernment leading to Awakening. – [Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, *The Wings to Awakening: An Anthology from the Pāli Canon.*]*

Nonetheless, the passage from the *Anguttara Nikāya* certainly seems to imply that at least the first jhāna is required for awakening.

On a very practical level, the Buddhist nun Ayya Khema argued that in this modern age - with all of its distractions - it is even more difficult to progress as a meditator without a mind that is settled and concentrated by attaining jhāna. We have become extremely proficient at cultivating a distracted mind, thus the necessity of applying the antidote – concentration – is even more critical.

On a practical note, we do what we enjoy. Meditative absorption is pleasant, and it makes meditation pleasant and enjoyable. I think it is safe to say that despite the stereotypical image of the serene meditator, the vast majority of meditators do not enjoy meditation. They consider it something they have to do rather than something they want to do. Particularly in the West we tend to be achievement oriented and self-

critical. When we take up the practice of meditation, it just becomes, as Larry Rosenberg says, another way to suffer. We can't keep our attention on the breath – which, of course, no one can when they start – and that just becomes another way to fail.

The way the Buddha taught depended somewhat on his audience, so it is difficult to make broad generalizations about his teaching. However, for the most part, the negative way in which jhāna is viewed by most meditation teachers is not the way the Buddha taught. Jhāna was almost always the first meditative attainment for his monastics. Of the seven factors of awakening, four of them are related to jhāna: Joy or rapture (*pīti*), tranquility (*passaddhi*), concentration (*samādhi*), and equanimity (*upekkha*). As noted, the Buddha emphasized the merits of the pleasure that comes from meditative absorption, and further, it makes sense that this pleasure is an important and useful fruit of the path.

The Arūpas (Immaterial States)

In a later formulation, the four “immaterial attainments” were also classified as jhāna, being numbered jhānas 5-8. These states are “immaterial” in that when the mind is in these states, the experience of a physical body disappears. They are as follows:

1. The base of boundless space
2. The base of boundless consciousness
3. The base of nothingness
4. The base of neither-perception nor non-perception.

In brief, the mind is first expanded to experience infinite space. Next the attention is focused on the consciousness that is aware of infinite space. Then one becomes aware of the insubstantial nature of all that exists. In the base of neither perception nor non-perception it is no longer possible to detect the act of perception, although the mind is still aware.

In the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the arūpas are never referred to as jhāna. However, the four material jhānas along with the arūpas are often called

the “eight meditative attainments.” Thus, there is some understanding that these eight states are related.

(Note: When I was practicing Zen, I was told that “there is nothing to gain” and that there are “no attainments.” However, the Buddha’s teachings often use the word “attainment.” The Buddha’s path is a series of skills that are mastered, and each of these skills is an “attainment”.)

In 22 suttas both the material jhānas and the arūpas occur together. This is a bit of a mixed message. Bhikkhu Bodhi notes in the introduction to the *Majjhima Nikāya* that once the fourth jhāna is attained, there are two possible paths of meditation. One is the attainment of the arūpas, and the other is the cultivation of supernormal powers. However, some arahants (fully awakened people) never practiced the arūpas or developed supernormal powers. The tradition holds that the optimal path to awakening is via the fourth jhāna – which is what the Buddha did - and this position is supported by the texts.

Alternative Paths to Liberation

Along those lines, the comment of Bhikkhu Bodhi’s is worth some consideration. The classic way of presenting the path in the *Majjhima Nikāya* is to turn your attention – after the fourth jhāna – to the recollection of past lives. However, the discourses give quite a variety of practices and paths. A particularly interesting case is the “Kāyagatāsati Sutta: Mindfulness of the Body” [MN 119], where meditation practices that focus on the body alone are used as a complete path to awakening:

“By realizing for oneself with direct knowledge, one here and now enters upon and abides in the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom that are taintless with the destruction of the taints.” - [MN 119.42]

Even in the standard formula where liberation is attained by doing the four material jhānas, and then coming to the Three Knowledges, there is

some variation. The usual case is for the third knowledge to be the four noble truths. However, in some case the third knowledge is described as deliverance by wisdom:

“When, by realizing for himself with direct knowledge, he here and now enters upon and abides in the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom that are taintless with the destruction of the taints, that pertains to his true knowledge.” - [MN 53.24]

(Note that a common element between the Four Noble Truths and deliverance by wisdom is the destruction of the taints (inflows/outflow/influxes), or “āsavas”.)

This subject could constitute a study by itself. If you start looking at other important suttas, such as the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta [MN 10] and the Ānāpānasati Sutta [MN 118], it seems clear that the Buddha taught the path to liberation in a number of ways.

The Brahma Viharas

Ajahn Analāyo has said that often the jhānas and the “brahma viharas” (*loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity*) are referenced in conjunction. I think this is a harder case to make, at least by using the *Majjhima Nikāya* alone as a source. Only 10 suttas reference both jhāna and the brahma viharas. However, metta, in particular, can be used as a way to access jhāna, and that is an ancient practice. (The breath is the most common way to access jhāna.) Likewise, Ayya Khema has pointed out the strong relationship between the second jhāna and metta. When in the second jhāna, if you switch to metta practice, the meditator can experience unbounded unconditional loving-kindness. Thus, metta can be used to access jhāna, and jhāna can be used to experience metta. They are closely related energies.

The Five Hindrances

Traditionally the way jhāna is taught is that you first overcome the Five Hindrances (*desire, ill-will, restlessness, sloth, and doubt*) before you attain jhāna. However, they are not included pro forma every time that jhāna is described. Only 11 times in the *Majjhima Nikāya* are jhāna and the Five Hindrances used together. The Five Hindrances do not disappear in one step, and then you attain jhāna in some other step. It is more that as you get more concentrated, the Five Hindrances disappear on their own. To be sure, there are practices to help you overcome each of the Five Hindrances. But as you get closer to jhāna, the act of becoming more concentrated simply causes them to disappear. When in any jhāna you can look for them and see that they are absent.

The Ninth Jhāna

There is also what is sometimes called the ninth jhāna, which is also called simply “cessation”:

When you reach the limits of perception, you realize that lesser mental activity is better for your calm and peaceful state. You enter a state of “cessation” of consciousness where there is only a very subtle form of perception. The meditator may appear to be unconscious. There have been reports of meditators having heart beats as low as 20 to 40 beats per minute at this jhānic level. The nearest way to describe this state is something like a very deep sleep. The eighth and ninth Jhānas are not full enlightenment, but very close stepping stones to full awakening. - [The Dhamma Encyclopedia, “[9 Jhānas](#)”]

Several sequences of meditative states mentioned in the Majjhima culminate in an attainment called the cessation of perception and feeling (saññāvedayitanirodha). Although this state always follows the last immaterial attainment, it is not, as may be supposed, merely one

higher step in the scale of concentration. Strictly speaking, the attainment of cessation pertains neither to serenity nor to insight. It is a state reached by the combined powers of serenity and insight in which all mental processes are temporarily suspended. The attainment is said to be accessible only to non-returners and arahants who have also mastered the jhānas and immaterial states. Detailed canonical discussions of it are found in MN 43 and MN 44. - [MN Introduction]

You almost never hear about it, even in the traditional commentaries like the *Visuddhimagga*. But it does occur in eight suttas, which is significant. Clearly this, too, was a known practice among the Buddha's monks and nuns. There are indications that the ninth jhāna is only accessible to those who are already arahants.

Not All Jhāna References Are Exactly the Same

Because there are so many repetitive phrases in the Pāli canon, I expected to find nearly all of the references to use the same formula. There is a lot of controversy over what parts of the canon are original from the time of the Buddha and what was added later. There are some discourses – most notoriously the “Mahāparinibbāna Sutta: The Great Passing” [DN 16] – that rather obviously contain later material. (Dr. Andrew Olendzki calls it a “cut and paste job”.) There are other suttas – commonly referred to as “composite suttas” – that may or may not have had some original content, but stock passages were added later. The important Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta is known to contain added material.

But as you can see by looking through the jhāna passages, there is not very much literal repetition. There are numerous slight variations from discourse to discourse. This, in my mind, gives the references greater authenticity. If every passage was identical, then the odds would be greater that they may have been added later.

“Sanitized” Buddhadhama

Thānissaro Bhikkhu describes what he calls the “sanitized” way in which Buddhadhama has come to the West. This sanitizing process excludes not only the jhānas, but the Buddhist cosmology – heavens, hells, gods, etc. – the central issue of rebirth (which “secular” Buddhists pass off as “skillful means”), the supermundane powers that can result as part of the path, and even something as basic as the Three Knowledges that the Buddha attained on the night of his enlightenment. And a teaching such as the ninth jhāna is rarely mentioned.

And yet all of these topics, as can be seen in the spreadsheet, show up repeatedly. It would be very difficult to argue on the basis of the Pāli Canon that all of these are not central to the Buddha’s teaching. In fact, the whole of the Buddha’s teaching does not hang together without all of these elements. One of the beauties of the Buddha’s teaching is how coherent it is.

(Note: When westerners first discovered Buddhism in the 19th century, in the beginning there was some debate about whether such a person as the Buddha ever existed, or whether the teachings of Buddhism were a composite of many teachers over time. Eventually, as the Pāli canon came to be translated and understood, it became clear that it would be very difficult for more than one individual to establish a set of such extensive teachings with such coherence. Eventually scholars became convinced that this coherence could only be the result of a single mind.)

It isn’t that there are not some inconsistencies in the canon. There are. But these inconsistencies are so infrequent that they stand out, even to the untrained reader. A classic example is the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, and the part that Ānanda plays in this story. Ānanda is accused of refusing to ask the Buddha to continue living, when – according to the sutta – such a request would have been honored. In a way, poor Ānanda is accused of being responsible for the Buddha dying prematurely.

But this part of the story is so out of character for Ānanda, who tirelessly

and selflessly served the Buddha for so long, that it stands out like a sore thumb. Then as one learns how much jealousy there was toward Ānanda because of his closeness to the Buddha (Ānanda was the Buddha's attendant, sort of the chief of staff, and as such he controlled access to the Buddha), and how much resentment there was toward him for having convinced the Buddha to ordain women, that it becomes clear why such a story could have been added later.

This is not to argue that someone who is from the west and who is attending their first class on meditation should be hit with a plethora of teachings that sound like a combination of a cult and science fiction. That would not be very skillful. But to actively deny such teachings is simply to deny the obvious, or even worse is intentionally misleading. If a teacher does not or cannot accept all of the teachings of the Buddha that is one thing, but to misrepresent the Buddha's teachings because of the limits of cultural conditioning, is at least dishonest. The teachings deserve to be presented as is, and not explained away simply so they will fit into some narrow cultural context. This is what the Buddha called "wrong view," and he was particularly harsh with his monks and nuns who espoused wrong views.

An example of true, traditional teaching comes from the book *Keeping the Breath in Mind & Lessons in Samadhi* by Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo. Ajahn Lee is a legendary Thai forest monk who died in 1961. In this book, Ajahn Lee teaches the precise formula used in the Pāli canon, that is, to master the first, second, third, and fourth jhānas, and then to turn your attention to the recollection of past lives. This, of course, is exactly what the Buddha did on the night of his enlightenment.

What is perhaps even more interesting is that – despite the fact that this is the formula presented over and over again in the *Majjhima Nikāya* - in over two decades of attending meditation retreats and in reading hundreds of books on Buddhism, I never had anyone teach this most fundamental part of the path.

Of course, you would not teach beginning western students in this way.

But one would think – at least I would think – that in a couple of decades of serious practice, it might have come up.

I have to give thanks to Thānissaro Bhikkhu, who not only made the comments about how the Buddhadhamma is sanitized in the west, but for encouraging students to read Ajahn Lee's meditation instructions, and also to read the story of Ajahn Lee's life (*The Autobiography of Phra Ajaan Lee*), which presents some remarkable material.

The mysteries of life are vast and humbling. In order to discover the ultimate truth about life, you have to be willing to set aside your opinions about how things are, in order to really see how things are. The most wonderful part of what the Buddha discovered is that there is a way to true happiness, to true freedom from suffering. The irrepressible Robert Thurman says, "Wouldn't it have been a bummer if after all that effort the Buddha discovered that life really is a mess and we are all just doomed to suffer." (This is highly paraphrased.) But that is not what he discovered, and not only did he unravel the truth of the way things are, but with unprecedented skill and unmatched compassion, he showed us how we too, can be free.

And that, then, is the real purpose of this exercise. It isn't to express Yet Another Opinion about how things are. It is to take the best source material that we have, to set aside pre-conceived notions about life, and to see what can be seen. Then the task becomes putting this into practice. The Buddha never – famously – asks us to accept anything just because he said it. The Buddhadhamma is a vast, comprehensive, repeatable experiment. The first step in the Noble Eightfold path is right view. We understand the teachings as best we can and then put them into practice. We come back to right view over and over again as our experience helps us deepen our wisdom. Eventually this path and practice leads to complete understanding, and complete freedom.

Sutta Reference	Jhanas				Arupas ⁵				3 Knowledges				Brahma viharas				Stages ¹³				Count ²⁴																			
	1st jhāna ¹	2nd jhāna ²	3rd jhāna ³	4th jhāna ⁴	Infinite space (5th jhāna)	Infinite consciousness (6th jhāna)	Nothingness (7th jhāna)	Neither perception nor non-perception (8th jhāna)	cessation (9th jhāna) ¹⁹	Past lives ⁶	Beings reborn according to their karma ⁷	4 Noble Truths ⁸	Deliverance by wisdom ⁹	Lovingkindness (mettā)	Compassion (karuṇā)	Altruistic joy (mudittā)	Equanimity (upekkhā)	Dependent origination ¹⁰	Precepts	Āsava (taints) ¹¹		Supernormal powers ¹²	Stream-entry (sotāpanna) ¹⁴	Once-returner (sakadāgāmin) ¹⁵	Non-returner (anāgāmin) ¹⁶	Fully liberated one (arahant) ¹⁷	Emptiness (voidness) ¹⁷	Eightfold noble path ¹⁸	5 Hindrances ²⁰	Ascetic practices ²¹	Khandas ²²	4 Foundations of mindfulness (satipatthānas) ²³								
94.22-25	X	X	X	X						X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X																	39					
98.45	X	X	X	X																															40					
99.17	X	X												X	X	X	X																		41					
100.31-34	X	X	X	X						X	X	X																								42				
101.38-41	X	X	X	X						X	X	X																									43			
102.17-21	R	R	R	R	R	R	X																													44				
105.10 ³⁸				R	R	R	X	X																													45			
106.3-4				R	R	R	X	X																													46			
107.10	X	X	X	X																																	47			
108.17, 108.27	X	X	X	X						X	X		X						X		X																48			
111.3-111.10	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X																													49		
112.18	X	X	X	X						X	X	X							X																			50		
113.21-24	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X																													51		
117.3	←----- -----→																																					52		
118.19-20 ³⁹	←----- -----→																																					53		
119.18-21,36 (120.33-36)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X					X								X																	54		
(121.6-9)					X	X	X	X												X																			55	
122.4, 122.8	X	X	X	X	R	R	R	R																															56	
125.2, 125.25	X	X	X	X						X	X	X							X																				57	
127.8	←----- -----→													X	X	X	X	X																				58		
128.31-32 (137.19-26)	R	R	R	R	X	X	X	X	X																														59	
138.12-19	X	X	X	X																																			60	
139.9	X	X	X	X																																			61	
140.20 ⁴⁰					R																																		62	
141.31	X	X	X	X									X																										62	
(143.12)					X	X	X	X																																62

Spreadsheet Footnotes

Note: “MN Footnote” refers to Bhikkhu Bodhi’s footnotes in his translation of the *Majjhima Nikāya*.

1. “Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered and abided in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion.” - [MN 4.23]
2. “With the stilling of applied and sustained thought, I entered upon and abided in the second jhāna, which has self-confidence and singleness of mind without applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of concentration.” - [MN 4.24]
3. “With the fading away as well of rapture, I abided in equanimity, and mindful and fully aware, still feeling pleasure with the body, I entered upon and abided in the third jhāna, on account of which noble ones announce: ‘He has a pleasant abiding who has

equanimity and is mindful.” - [MN 4.25]

4. “With the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, I entered upon and abided in the fourth jhāna, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity.” - [MN 4.26]
5. “From the fourth jhāna three alternative lines of further development become possible. In a number of passages outside the sequence on the gradual training (MN 8, MN 25, MN 26, MN 66, etc.) the Buddha mentions four meditative states that continue the mental unification established by the jhānas. These states, described as “the liberations that are peaceful and immaterial,” are, like the jhānas, also mundane. Distinguished from the jhānas by their transcendence of the subtle mental image that forms the object in the jhānas, they are named after their own exalted objects: the base of infinite space, the base of infinite consciousness, the base of nothingness, and the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. In the Pāli commentaries these states came to be called the immaterial or formless jhānas (arūpajjhāna).” - [MN Introduction]
6. “When my concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to knowledge of the recollection of past lives. I recollected my manifold past lives, that is, one birth, two births, three births, four births, five births, ten births, twenty births, thirty births, forty births, fifty births, a hundred births, a thousand births, a hundred thousand births, many aeons of world-contraction, many aeons of world-expansion, many aeons of world-contraction and expansion: ‘There I was so named, of such a clan, with such an appearance, such was my nutriment, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such my life-term; and passing away from there, I reappeared elsewhere; and there too I was so named, of such a clan, with such an appearance, such was my nutriment, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such my life-term; and passing away from there, I reappeared here.’ Thus with their aspects and particulars I recollected my manifold past lives.” - [MN 4.27]

7. "When my concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings. With the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, I saw beings passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior, fair and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate. I understood how beings pass on according to their actions thus: 'These worthy beings who were ill conducted in body, speech, and mind, revilers of noble ones, wrong in their views, giving effect to wrong view in their actions, on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared in a state of deprivation, in a bad destination, in perdition, even in hell; but these worthy beings who were well conducted in body, speech, and mind, not revilers of noble ones, right in their views, giving effect to right view in their actions, on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared in a good destination, even in the heavenly world.' Thus with the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, I saw beings passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior, fair and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate, and I understood how beings pass on according to their actions." - [MN 4.29]
8. "When my concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to knowledge of the destruction of the taints. I directly knew as it actually is: 'This is suffering'; I directly knew as it actually is: 'This is the origin of suffering'; I directly knew as it actually is: 'This is the cessation of suffering'; I directly knew as it actually is: 'This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.' I directly knew as it actually is: 'These are the taints'; I directly knew as it actually is: 'This is the origin of the taints'; I directly knew as it actually is: 'This is the cessation of the taints'; I directly knew as it actually is: 'This is the way leading to the cessation of the taints.'" - [MN 4.31]
9. "When, by realizing for himself with direct knowledge, he here and now enters upon and abides in the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom that are taintless with the destruction of

the taints, that pertains to his true knowledge.” - [MN 53.24]

10. “Dependent origination” is the Buddhist law of causality:

“Thus when this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases. That is, with ignorance as condition, volitional formations [come to be]; with volitional formations as condition, consciousness; with consciousness as condition, name-and-form; with name-and-form as condition, the six sense bases; with the six sense bases as condition, contact; with contact as condition, feeling; with feeling as condition, craving; with craving as condition, clinging; with clinging as condition, existence; with existence as condition, birth; with birth as condition, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering. This, bhikkhus, is called dependent origination. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

“But with the remainderless fading away and cessation of ignorance comes cessation of volitional formations; with the cessation of volitional formations, cessation of consciousness; with the cessation of consciousness, cessation of name-and-form; with the cessation of name-and-form, cessation of the six sense bases; with the cessation of the six sense bases, cessation of contact; with the cessation of contact, cessation of feeling; with the cessation of feeling, cessation of craving; with the cessation of craving, cessation of clinging; with the cessation of clinging, cessation of existence; with the cessation of existence, cessation of birth; with the cessation of birth, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair cease. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.” - [SN 12.21]

11. “When I knew and saw thus, my mind was liberated from the taint of sensual desire, from the taint of being, and from the taint of ignorance. When it was liberated, there came the knowledge: ‘It is liberated.’ I directly knew: ‘Birth is destroyed, the holy life has

been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.” - [MN 4.32]

12. “If a bhikkhu should wish: ‘May I wield the various kinds of supernormal power: having been one, may I become many; having been many, may I become one; may I appear and vanish; may I go unhindered through a wall, through an enclosure, through a mountain as though through space; may I dive in and out of the earth as though it were water; may I walk on water without sinking as though it were earth; seated cross-legged, may I travel in space like a bird; with my hand may I touch and stroke the moon and sun so powerful and mighty; may I wield bodily mastery, even as far as the Brahma-world,’ let him fulfill the precepts...” - [MN 6.14]
13. “Progress along the supramundane path is marked by four major breakthroughs, each of which ushers the disciple through two subordinate phases called the path (*magga*) and its fruit (*phala*). The phase of path has the special function of eliminating a determinate number of defilements to which it is directly opposed, the mental impediments that hold us in bondage to the round of rebirths. When the work of the path has been completed, the disciple realizes its corresponding fruit, the degree of liberation made accessible by that particular path. The canonical formula of homage to the Sangha refers obliquely to these four planes of liberation—each with its phase of path and fruit—when it extols the Blessed One’s community of noble disciples as comprising “the four pairs of persons, the eight types of individuals” (MN 7.7). These four pairs are obtained by taking, for each stage, the one who has entered upon the way to realization of the fruit and the one who has attained the fruit.” - [MN Introduction]
14. “...the path of stream-entry, has the task of eradicating the grossest three fetters: identity view, i.e., the view of a self among the five aggregates; doubt in the Buddha and his teaching; and adherence to external rules and observances, either ritualistic or ascetic, in the belief that they can bring purification. When the disciple realizes the fruit of this path he becomes a stream-enterer

(*sotāpanna*), who has entered the ‘stream’ of the Noble Eightfold Path that will carry him irreversibly to Nibbāna. The stream-enterer is bound to reach final liberation in a maximum of seven more births, which all occur either in the human world or in the heavenly realms.” - [MN Introduction]

15. “The second supramundane path attenuates to a still greater degree the root defilements of lust, hatred, and delusion, though without yet eradicating them. On realizing the fruit of this path the disciple becomes a once-returner (*sakadāgāmin*), who is due to return to this world (i.e., the sense-sphere realm) only one more time and then make an end of suffering.” - [MN Introduction]
16. “The third path eradicates the next two fetters, sensual desire and ill will; it issues in the fruit of the non-returner (*anāgāmin*), who is due to reappear by spontaneous birth in one of the special celestial realms called the Pure Abodes, and there attain final Nibbāna without ever returning from that world.” - [MN Introduction]
17. “And what, friend, is the deliverance of mind through voidness? Here a bhikkhu, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, reflects thus: ‘This is void of a self or of what belongs to a self.’ This is called the deliverance of mind through voidness.” - [MN 43.33]
18. This means that the eightfold noble path (*right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration* [MN 3.8]) is referenced without being in the context of the four noble truths.
19. What is sometimes called the “ninth jhāna” (the first four jhānas plus the four immaterial states = eight jhānas) is “cessation”:

“Again, by completely surmounting the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the cessation of perception and feeling. And his taints are destroyed by his seeing with wisdom. This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Māra, to have become invisible to the Evil One by depriving Māra’s eye of its opportunity, and to have crossed beyond attachment to the world.” - [MN 25.20]

20. “On returning from his almsround, after his meal he sits down, folding his legs crosswise, setting his body erect, and establishing mindfulness before him. Abandoning covetousness for the world, he abides with a mind free from covetousness; he purifies his mind from covetousness. Abandoning ill will and hatred, he abides with a mind free from ill will, compassionate for the welfare of all living beings; he purifies his mind from ill will and hatred. Abandoning sloth and torpor, he abides free from sloth and torpor, percipient of light, mindful and fully aware; he purifies his mind from sloth and torpor. Abandoning restlessness and remorse, he abides unagitated with a mind inwardly peaceful; he purifies his mind from restlessness and remorse. Abandoning doubt, he abides having gone beyond doubt, unperplexed about wholesome states; he purifies his mind from doubt.

“Having thus abandoned these five hindrances, imperfections of the mind that weaken wisdom, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, he enters upon and abides in the first jhāna...” - [MN 27.18-19]

21. The Buddha mentions a number of ascetic practices that he did before abandoning them as the way to awakening. These include “breathless meditation” [MN 36.21], “cutting off of food” and “taking very little food” [MN 36.27-28].
22. “And what are the five aggregates affected by clinging? They are: the material form aggregate affected by clinging, the feeling aggregate affected by clinging, the perception aggregate affected by clinging, the formations aggregate affected by clinging, and the consciousness aggregate affected by clinging.” - [MN 28.4]
23. The four foundations of mindfulness (*body, feelings, mental formations, and dharmas*)
24. Only suttas that include the four material jhānas are included in the count.
25. “The emphasis on unity (*ekatta*), MA informs us, is characteristic of one who attains the jhānas, in which the mind occurs in a single

mode on a single object.” - [Footnote 18]

26. In MN 7 the factors *gladness, rapture, tranquility, and pleasure* are listed without being in a structured format that explicitly defines them to be *jhāna*:

“When he has given up, expelled, released, abandoned, and relinquished [the imperfections of the mind] in part, he considers thus: ‘I am possessed of unwavering confidence in the Buddha,’ and he gains inspiration in the meaning, gains inspiration in the Dhamma, gains gladness connected with the Dhamma. When he is glad, rapture is born in him; in one who is rapturous, the body becomes tranquil; one whose body is tranquil feels pleasure; in one who feels pleasure, the mind becomes concentrated.” - [MN 7.8]

As Bhikkhu Bodhi points out in footnote 93. The original Pāli seems to indicate that what is being described is “*samadhi*”, “though it is puzzling why *samādhi* itself is not used”. I am, perhaps, taking liberties by listing MN 7 as referencing *jhāna*, but I believe that is what is meant here.

27. The “O” in the spreadsheet cell indicates that in this sutta the Buddha is describing how some bhikkhus may overestimate their attainment when practicing this *jhāna*.
28. MN Footnote 155: *MA explains “exalted mind” and “unsurpassed mind” as the mind pertaining to the level of the jhānas and immaterial meditative attainments, and “unexalted mind” and “surpassed mind” as the mind pertaining to the level of sense-sphere consciousness. “Liberated mind” must be understood as a mind temporarily and partly freed from defilements through insight or the jhānas.*
29. The “A” in the spreadsheet cell indicates that in this sutta the Buddha is describing the problem of becoming attached to *jhāna* states. In all of the other cases he is describing the benefit.
30. MN Footnote 208: *The “rapture and pleasure that are apart from sensual pleasures” are the rapture and pleasure pertaining to the first and second jhānas; the states “more peaceful than that” are the higher*

jhānas. From this passage it seems that a disciple may attain even to the second path and fruit without possessing mundane jhāna.

31. MN Footnote 239: *The higher mind (adhicitta) is the mind of the eight meditative attainments used as a basis for insight...*
32. A number in the cell indicates the number of times in the sutta this factor is referenced.
33. "He sees himself purified of all these evil unwholesome states, he sees himself liberated from them. When he sees this, gladness is born in him. When he is glad, rapture is born in him; in one who is rapturous, the body becomes tranquil; one whose body is tranquil feels pleasure; in one who feels pleasure, the mind becomes concentrated." - [MN 40.8]
34. MN Footnote 571: *According to MA, the "equanimity that is based on diversity" is equanimity (i.e., apathy, indifference) related to the five cords of sensual pleasure; the "equanimity that is based on unity" is the equanimity of the fourth jhāna.*
35. MN Footnote 688: *The "rapture and pleasure secluded from sensual pleasures" signifies the first and second jhānas, "something more peaceful than that" the higher jhānas and the four paths.*
36. MN Footnote 694: *MA: This refers to the eight meditative attainments. As a minimum he should become proficient in the preliminary work of one meditation subject, such as a kasiṇa.*
37. MN 77 lists many other Buddhist topics. They are not given a column in the spreadsheet because they only occur in this sutta. These topics include:
 - i. The four right kinds of striving (zeal for: *the non-arising of unarisen unwholesome states, the abandoning of arisen unwholesome states, the arising of unarisen wholesome states, the continuance, non-disappearance, stabilize and perfect arisen wholesome states*)
 - ii. The four bases for spiritual power (*desire, energy, tranquility, investigation*)
 - iii. The five faculties (*faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom*)
 - iv. The five powers (*faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom*)

- v. The eight liberations
 - a. The first liberation corresponds to the first two of the “eight bases for transcendence” (next on this list).
 - b. The second liberation corresponds to the third and fourth of the eight bases for transcendence
 - c. The third liberation corresponds to 5-8 of the eight bases for transcendence.
 - d. The fourth liberation is the first immaterial state
 - e. The fifth liberation is the second immaterial state
 - f. The sixth liberation is the third immaterial state.
 - g. The seventh liberation is the fourth immaterial state
 - h. The eighth liberation is “cessation (9th jhāna).
- vi. The eight bases for transcendence

These are yogic practices that may have existed prior to the Buddha and added to the teachings later. They correspond to the four “color kasiṇas”: blue, red, white and yellow.

- a. An “internal” (on the body) color is contemplated leading to perceiving it outside of the body. It is “limited” and “not beautiful”.
 - b. Same as #1 but “limitless”
 - c. An external object is perceived, otherwise the same as #1.
 - d. An external object is perceived, otherwise the same as #2.
 - e. An external blue object is perceived. It is immeasurable and beautiful.
 - f. The same as #5, but yellow.
 - g. The same as #5, but red.
 - h. The same as #5, but white.
- vii. The ten kasiṇas (earth, water, fire, air, blue, yellow, red, white)
- viii. The divine ear element
- ix. Understanding the minds of others

x. The divine eye

38. MN Footnote 1000: *Āneñja (BBS); āṇañja (PTS)*. This is a technical term for the meditative attainments from the fourth jhāna through the four immaterial attainments. But since the highest two immaterial attainments are dealt with separately, it seems that in this sutta only the fourth jhāna and the lower two immaterial attainments are intended as “the imperturbable.
39. MN Footnote 1118: *One experiences rapture in two ways: by attaining one of the lower two jhānas in which rapture is present, one experiences rapture in the mode of serenity; by emerging from that jhāna and contemplating that rapture as subject to destruction, one experiences rapture in the mode of insight.*

MN Footnote 1119: *The same method of explanation as in n.1118 applies to the second and third clauses, except that the second comprises the three lower jhānas and the third all four jhānas. The mental formation is perception and feeling (see MN 44.14), which is tranquillized by the development of successively higher levels of serenity and insight.*

40. MN Footnote 1275: *MA identifies this as the equanimity of the fourth jhāna.*